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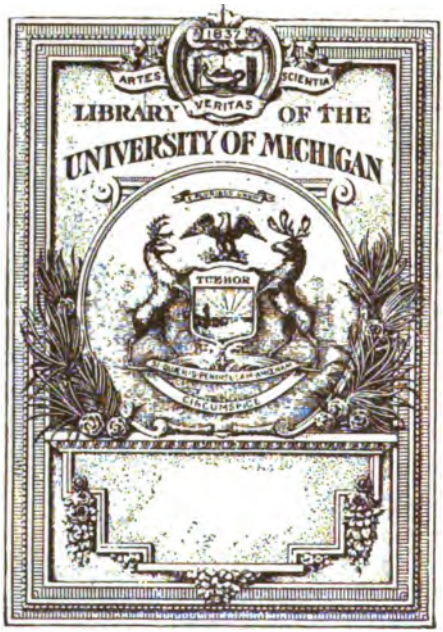
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THE MASTER OF THE HILLS

The Master of the Hills

A Tale of the Georgia Mountains

BY

SARAH JOHNSON COCKE
AUTHOR OF "BY-PATHS IN DIXIE"

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TO
MY MOTHER
MARY WILLIS COBB JOHNSON

319483

The rails that form the fence of fame
Oft-times decay or drop.
It is not strange to find sometimes
The bottom rail a-top.

FOREWORD

It was during a stay in the rugged portion of the Georgia mountains that I was unexpectedly led to study the lives of the quaint people of that region, and I found them to be as entirely cut off from the rest of America as though they were a part of another hemisphere. I came to comprehend that these men understood our laws as little as Society understands the character of the man of the mountains who is forced for a living into the precarious business of moonshining. Closer touch with these silent, proud, sensitive people proved their absolute ignorance of conditions since the time of the Revolution. The code of individuality and liberty fought for by their fathers has been handed down to them untouched, and in the isolation of their mountain fastness they still fight to maintain that principle. The thin mountain soil has bred a poverty of conditions that is unbelievable. Away from progress and enlightenment many have degenerated hopelessly; but the majority of these men of wit and honor only await the opportunity of education to take their place among the best Americans.

The object of this book is to portray representative types from the groups that people the waste places of the mountains from Georgia to Virginia, and to awaken an interest in Americans for Americans. In these pages I leave these mountain folk to speak for themselves.

THE MASTER OF THE HILLS

THE MASTER OF THE HILLS

PART I

CHAPTER I

"TO think the boys have actually sailed!" And Polly Pockets turned from the cozy group in the old-fashioned library, humming under her breath as she ran to the window, "And bringing a real live Marquis home! 'On marriage bent,' too!"

But the mood changed at sight of the unromantic lawn.

"I wish it would stop raining. First impressions always prejudice one"—she thrummed poutingly on the pane—"and dripping trees are not conducive to romance. Why can't it clear up and turn warmer?" The girl sighed, and returned to her seat before the fire. She opened her book, but her girlish imagination ran through pages of meaningless words, while outside the wind moaned drearily.

The spring of 1858 came late and moodily on the hills and valleys of central Georgia. The first March winds that should have hurried to bring into blossoms every thicket and garden swept down from the winter-bound mountains of the North with chilly touch, paralyzing the trees and shrubs.

The plantations reaching out on all sides from Athens were waiting under watery skies in the aftermath of the brief winter for sunshine and the hand of the sower. From these acres the town of Athens drew its wealth, while the city homes of the gentlemen planters protectingly spread their square roofs and raised their white pillars under virgin oaks and secluded themselves in prodigal gardens.

But the gardens were now bare, except for the gay banners that the yellow jessamine flaunted from the deserted summer houses, or for the flash of purple hyacinth and golden narcissus in the borders. They sent delicious whiffs of perfume into the chilly air. The oaks, older than the oldest homes, etched their skeleton figures to the finest tips of their budded twigs against the late evening sky.

All the vistas were clear to the University buildings, the core of the life of the town. This little University was the symbol and outward evidence of the ideal which had drawn the rich farmers from their ancestral acres into the closer bonds of community life.

Ever since the University opened its doors in 1801, the lecture room and campus had defined and colored the intellectual and social life of the town. But sons of wealthy families still went to England for a finishing touch, supplemented by many visits to old-world relatives and vacations spent in continental travel. The University, however, isolated and short of many resources of the larger educational institutions, even of that day, yet sent forth an atmosphere in the little

city which was felt not only in the lives of the planters who drew with proprietary intimacy close to her walls, but in the homes of merchants and trades people thriving in the expanding community.

On a rise stood the Warner Mansion, a fine type of the older builder's art. Built not for the fashion and use of a lifetime, but planned for sons and grandsons, it gave solidarity to family character, adding honor to the name.

From the Warner windows cheerful lights began to glow in the early twilight. In the library the servants fed the fire with dry hickory. Judge Warner sat close by the table, absorbed in his paper. The old Judge was a friend to man, and all the countless unremembered acts of a good man's life had wrought upon his features a fine nobility of countenance. The years had whitened his abundant hair. His deep-set hazel eyes, that in moments of banter flashed with fun, now wore an expression of deep thought.

"Oh, Uncle, put down that paper, and let's talk about the boys' coming home," and Polly Pockets pushed a stool near his feet and sat upon it, reaching as she settled herself for the paper.

"Wait! Wait a moment, little Polly; I must read this fire-eating speech of Yancy's to the end."

The Judge turned back to his paper, and silence settled again upon the group. Finally Mrs. Warner closed her book and beckoned to Polly.

"Ho, ho! What's that you two are saying?" The head of the house yawned, laid the paper on the table, and without waiting for a reply leaned forward with

earnestness. "I'm afraid that in some things Yancy, fire-eater though he be, is right." He stood before the fire, holding the frock of his coat away from the blaze. "But the practical application of his ideas means the destruction of the nation. Still there must be some solution found which will harmonize conflicting thought and interests. If not, our sacrifice will have been in vain—and the Missouri Compromise a failure."

"Why, Uncle, you stumped the state for Governor Cobb on the sole issue of the Missouri Compromise."

"My little Polly, I espoused the cause of Governor Cobb because he strove with master loyalty to maintain the equilibrium of the states—to preserve the unity of the land. He did it in the face of criticism and opposition, and he accomplished it. I thank God I had a hand in his sweeping election that not only vindicated the honor of his statesmanship, but proved the majority of the state to be sane in their attitude to the Union."

"Don't talk law and politics any more. Let's read the letters again. I'm so happy, I cannot remember a thing but that they have already sailed." And Polly Pockets covered her face with her hands and laughed hysterically.

"What? Why, we've already read them twice," and he opened one of the letters apparently as an indulgence to his niece.

"No, Aunt Mary will read them this time—you skip if it's hard to make out."

With mock submission he handed the two foreign

packets to his wife, and settled in the comfortable hollow of the library chair, chuckling over the figure his son and nephew made at the court of Louis Napoleon.

"PARIS, Feb. 15, 1858.

"My dear Uncle:

"We returned here through an invitation amounting to a command from Cousin Louise, who was absent from Paris on our former visit. And, by the way, you would never remember she was English. Fifty years in France has turned the course of her circulation Frenchward until she is enough like the Count to be of his own blood. Both suffer from the infirmities of three-score and ten, but it is unacknowledged. They are always at their place at court.

"Needless to say we have lent ourselves to her charming demands, all except matrimonial schemes. The soft voices of our Southern girls carry across the ocean—so do not worry.

"Oh, apropos, tell Polly Pockets we are bringing home a real live Marquis! Matrimonially bent, too! He is Cousin Louise's nephew, or rather her husband's—the Marquis Henri de Layne.

"This news should put the town in a flutter. Tell Polly to whisper it confidentially to old Mrs. Williams so that it may be properly spread abroad before our arrival. Don't bother about brushing up your French; our guest speaks English like a native—educated at Oxford. He's a splendid fellow—a fairy godfather to us.

"Now to business—I am ready, Uncle, to assume the duties of my father's estate—both Polly Pockets's share and my own if you desire it. My conscience has sorely tormented me that I was not at home to celebrate my majority in removing this burden from you. I shall expect to go in harness on arrival, which is not far away now. For I long to prove to you and my beloved Aunt that the wisdom and love with which you have sheltered Polly Pockets and me is not lost.

"Tell Aunt and Polly they will be glad to see the trunks

we are bringing. Cousin Louise insists they must have an extra one from Paris. Tell Polly she will have to arrange more pockets!

"With remembrances to friends, howdy to the servants, and love to each of you dear ones, I am

"Your affectionate nephew,

"ROBERT NOY."

A stillness settled upon the circle about the hearth as they sought to enjoy to the fullest the flavor of this choice bit before steeping themselves in the pleasures of the next.

"Wonderful boys—splendid men," murmured the Judge as he settled down in the deep hollow of the winged chair. "True types of the American cavalier, every six foot of them." He rubbed his hands together in happy nervousness. "I know how to raise boys—but if I had listened to my wife they would have been bridled with blinds to keep out the glare of temptation—would have been deprived of all the masculine prerogatives of development, and out of unusual material would have developed into a couple of insignificant girl-men. My boys are all right—I have banked on the fine temper of their hearts."

Before Mrs. Warner's mind there appeared the laughing faces of her two boys—her sister's son and her own; and surely there was no difference between them in her motherly heart. Her Joe's fair complexion and auburn hair, which Polly called red; her Robert's olive coloring and black curls with the cowlick part on the wrong side. How she remembered

the tears that cow-lick part had cost, and how Joe magnanimously consented to appease Robert by brushing his shaggy locks on the same side. Her boys, both of them. And she shook out the fluffy mass of her knitting, tuning her thoughts to the rhythmic click of the needles.

Polly Pockets wrestled with the thought of the Marquis. After a mental inventory of her frocks, she decided exactly how she would appear the first week of his arrival. Indeed she was already rehearsing the introduction; she could hear her brother say, "And this is my little sister, Polly Pockets."

"Oh," she cried out in resentment, "don't let the boys call me Polly Pockets before the Marquis!"

Her auditors started from their reveries.

"What shall we call you, Mary Elizabeth?" And Mrs. Warner laid her work aside and reached for Polly's soft little hand.

"Oh, I don't mind the Polly part of it so much," she said in gentler tones, moving her chair closer to her Aunt's and chafing nervously that lady's thin white fingers. "It's the Pockets nickname that sounds so foolish, and I will not be introduced to strangers, particularly to a foreign nobleman, as 'Miss Polly Pockets.' I will not! I will not!" She rushed over to the Judge, threw herself into his lap and, fastening her arms around his neck, laid down the law of petty tyranny.

"Well, well," he laughed, "does this mean that I am to lay violent hands on any one calling you other than Mary Elizabeth?"

She released her arms about his neck, and sadly resumed her chair.

"Now, Uncle, you teasing me, too? I suppose I shall die with that terrible name still clinging to me, even inscribed on my tombstone."

"Oh, no, little Pol, little Mary Elizabeth, forgive your old Uncle, and leave those scapegoat boys to me. Why, I'll——"

But the quiet smile on Mrs. Warner's face checked the wildness of his threat. He unconsciously mopped his forehead with his big red silk handkerchief and changed the subject.

"Why, look here; we've forgotten about Joe's 'Indian' letter; this will never do; Mary, my dear, begin Joe's letter at once."

Mrs. Warner smiled again at the two, and began:

"LONDON, Feb. 28, 1858.

"You see, dearest Mother, we are returning home by a different route. Certain complications made it necessary. Cousin Louise is badly upset by our sudden departure; wound up by going to bed and calling in the Doctor. A little affair of Henri's necessitated haste, but do not let this prejudice you against him. He is the most delightful and wonderful man I ever saw. He has served under five flags, and is but lately from India where, as an attaché of some French general, was included in the royal entertainments the Rajah gave to some foreign prince, I do not remember who. You must get him to describe it to you. Wonderful! I can't begin to tell his thrilling experiences nor his miraculous escapes, too—just innocent trouble. We are entranced with him, and can hardly wait to share him with you; particularly, Polly will enjoy him.

"Please have a number-one body servant for him. My

Zeek's brother Jim ought to be good, and don't forget to have Zeek and Tom meet us at the boat in Savannah.

"Howdy to all the servants, especially to Zeek, and with tender affection to each of you, I am

"Your son

"JOSEPH WARNER."

The third reading of Joe's letter found Polly Pockets worked up to tearful unhappiness in fear lest her nickname would spoil the first impressions of the Marquis.

The Judge looked gently reproachful.

"Why, my child, I never knew your sane little head to be so full of silly thoughts before."

"I can't help it, and you simply must meet the boat at Savannah and lay down the law to the boys before they even start up-country. You will, won't you?"

The indulgent uncle made every concession and diplomatically intrenched himself behind a small mountain of manuscript.

"I must finish this opinion to-night. And you, little girl," pinching her cheek, "must be planning all sorts of matrimonial campaigns. Three young gentlemen on your hands—why bless me, one needs sleep to build up enough strength to outwit old soldiers like Mrs. Williams and her army of pretty kinswomen."

Polly walked slowly to the door, then softly crept back behind her uncle, placed her hands over his eyes and her mouth close to his ear.

"Robert and Joe must not know that I have taken up Greek. No, they mustn't"—she squeezed his neck

—"they'll make the Marquis think me a 'blue stocking,' and every other sort of horrid thing."

Polly Noy, just seventeen years old, already realized what every woman of her generation accepted, namely, that a taste for "higher learning" and womanly charms were incompatible ideals, and romance was opening a vista to a magical domain in Polly's excited imagination. She shuddered even to recall the unlovely and unloved figure of a "literary blue stocking." She squeezed her uncle tighter and tighter around the neck.

"Promise."

"I promise that if I hear a word on the subject, even though you read Sanskrit, I'll cane them both."

"Cross your heart in earnest."

The oath was taken and a happy little girl ran up the steps singing.

Once in her room, Polly's mind reverted to her wardrobe. Aggie, who had been nodding before the fire, awoke with the rustle of her mistress' skirts, and was wide-eyed at the stream of excitement that poured into her ears.

Far into the night Polly's thoughts still ran upon the new clothes in the trunks to arrive; she arranged parties with exactly the proper situations. Joe and Robert must never be near herself and the Marquis. Oh, if she could only avoid their inevitable teasing!

What if they should call her Polly Pockets to the Marquis and tell why?

Tears of anger sprang at the cruelty of such a name to follow one through life; such a foolish beginning, too, way back almost in babyhood.

Distinctly she recalled the occasion of its beginning; it was at the funeral of her widowed mother. She again saw herself and Robert walking up the long church aisle between her uncle and aunt. Their minds were absorbed with the revivification of their mother, which the superstitious negroes told them would occur with a given sign from the minister. Unconsciously the plaintive dirge the negro voices had wailed took possession of her:

My Mistis gone, but she ain't never die,
O Lawd—O Lawdy!
Doan put her in de groun'—caze she sho' gwinter fly,
O Lawd—O Lawdy!
Whin Mars Preach'r blow dat horn,
O Lawd—O Lawdy!
Mistis gwinter rise sho' as you is bo'n,
O Lawd—O Lawdy!

On and on the verses ran, framing a story so fantastic that their childish grief was submerged in the anticipation of alarming excitement. She felt the tired fidgety feeling of her little legs dangling from the high pews, the continuous unmeaning words of the service and no horn in sight. She remembered how she fain would have drawn her feet up and gone to sleep, but for the exciting thought of changing her home to "Joe's house," and, as though in sympathy, Robert whispered:

"I'm going to sleep in Joe's room, Polly, every night."

And she, who adored her aunt, bent close to his ear and whispered back:

"I'm going to sleep in a bed right by Aunt Mary's, too."

"I'm going to sleep in Joe's room forever and ever, too. And I'm going swimming and fishing with him every day."

"I don't care; I'm going to have two pockets in all my frocks."

"I've already got two." And his hands went into his pockets and pulled them wrong side out.

"Yes, but you haven't got anything in yours. I've got my Mama's thimble and a knife and two pieces of candy," letting the candy peep from the tiny pocket.

"They're mine," softly whined Robert, but Polly fastened her hand tightly over the pocket and, cuddling closer to Mrs. Warner, drew a part of that lady's flowing crêpe over her tiny face.

"Gimme my knife and candy, Polly Noy; I just gave them to you because you said Mama was dead and you didn't have anything to play with."

Polly drew farther away, and revealed another piece of candy, this time of a brown color. The whispers threatened to become audible as the disappointed boy clutched her hand.

"You haven't eaten yours, and you've got mine, too! Gimme my candy, I tell you." This he emphasized with a pinch.

"Aunt Mary!" she cried.

"Uncle, Polly's got a dress full of pockets with——"

Whereupon comforting arms drew each to a loving heart, while the congregation sobbed in audible

sympathy. Robert took advantage of the confusion and taunted in Polly's ear:

"Your name's Polly Pockets; I'm going to tell Joe; we are going to call you old Polly Pockets forever and ever."

And so they had, and the real hurt of the situation was, she had continued to have pockets in her frocks, as many as the wide folds of her gathered skirts admitted. She loved pockets. Again the tears fell.

"Aggie—Aggie!"

"Ma'm," came the sleepy voice from the pallet.

"Please wake up, I can't sleep."

"Lawd, honey Mistis, jes tu'n yo'se'f on de uth'r side, an' play like yer got ter git up—an' yer'll go ter sleep 'fo' yer knows hit."

CHAPTER II

THE gladness in Polly's heart scattered itself through the University. The coming of the Marquis de Layne was a matter of ardent interest to the entire community. Touches of paint and new furnishings in staid old mansions bespoke entertainment planned for the distinguished guest.

By the end of March the red hills of Georgia were sweet with honeysuckle and the garden borders of Warner Mansion were blue with violets.

As the high-swung family coach with four iron-gray horses turned in through the big gates, two dozen or more negroes suddenly sprang from the house, stables and gardens, shouting: "Heah come Marster f'um Savanner wid de boys!" "Howdy, Mars Joe!" "Howdy, Mars Robert!" They scattered themselves all along the avenue up to the mansion.

At the sound of negro voices, Mrs. Warner and Polly rushed to the already open front doors. Polly could hardly restrain herself from flying down the steps like a child, and only the well-mapped plan of introduction to the Marquis detained her. But as the coach door opened, and the steps fell in place, and Robert's foot appeared, Polly's form of meeting was dashed to the winds.

She ran to the top step, and would have bounded down to the carriage, had not her knees given out.

She leaned for an instant to steady herself against one of the high fluted pillars of the veranda, and in the next Robert and Joe had lifted her bodily from the floor. She clung with an arm on each, forgetful of the nobleman, until Judge Warner reminded her.

"I have the honor of presenting to my niece, Miss Mary Elizabeth Noy, the Marquis de Layne."

In a twinkling Polly was in the realms of romance. Her heart stopped, as she told the peeping Aggie afterwards.

She beheld him as the prince of her childish fairy stories. His low forehead hidden by brown wavy hair—the bluish tinge to the whites of his eyes concealed beneath long languorous lashes were unnoticed in the beauty of his mouth and teeth, which were relieved of effeminacy by a tiny waxed mustache and imperial.

At dinner he surpassed himself, not only in thrilling narratives, but also in charming anecdotes that turned on Robert and Joe at the French court.

Polly was entranced; she barely made a pretense of eating until the subject changed to politics. To her this theme fell like a blighting frost upon the conversational brilliancy.

"State Sovereignty, let us have this." The Marquis' interest seemed to deepen as Judge Warner, without passion, expounded the principles of State's Rights.

Polly looked imploringly at her aunt, who withdrew with her to the drawing room, leaving the gentlemen to their wine and politics.

"Isn't it a shame that politics has to ruin every conversation—every party—everything!"

"Why, Polly"—Mrs. Warner seated herself on a small rosewood sofa—"I thought you loved to hear your uncle's conservative views of our national problems."

"Yes, I did once, but now that I know all about them," she laughed, "it bores me to death."

"Are you sure it is that?"

Polly blushed, and sprang impulsively towards her aunt. She tripped in a flounce of her skirt and, falling in the circumscribed space, caused an entangling collision of hoop-skirts.

"Mercy! We are fortunate the gentlemen are not present."

Polly laughed until the tears came. Mrs. Warner retreated with dignity towards the center of the room.

"Come back, dear; we can sit here together perfectly; it was my fault; come back."

But Mrs. Warner, suspicious of the girl's high spirits, made her way still farther in the direction of the piano. She lightly ran her hands over the introduction to the Carnival of Venice, and challenged her niece to an accompaniment on the harp.

"No, dear, I cannot play prosaic selections to-night." She balanced the harp gracefully before her and touched the strings lightly. "Shall it be 'Drink to me only with thine eyes?' "

Without waiting for response, she struck the chords. Her rich mezzo voice, blending with the delicate strains of the harp, drifted from one tender ballad to an-

other, until interrupted by the arrival of the gentlemen, the face of the delighted Frenchman foremost among them. Instantly Polly rose, the little curls about her ears shaking in her haste to leave the instrument.

"Please, Mademoiselle, do not stop. We want the Lorelei, even though it means our destruction."

"Have no fear, Monsieur le Marquis, the craft of hospitality sails only the safe waters of friendship."

"But there are many tempting outlets to those calm waters into which one may unconsciously drift if——"

"If the moon is bright?" She moved towards the fateful sofa. He bowed in his foreign manner before her. "Will Mademoiselle Noy sing to me one song in my native tongue?"

Just touching the tips of her fingers, he led her back to the harp, where French songs, German, Scotch and Irish followed, inviting by their pathos, fun or sentiment the deep bass of Joe, or the clear appealing tones of Robert's tenor, and sometimes luring a chorus from all.

"As I was about to say, Monsieur le Marquis, when we were interrupted"—the Judge took up the thread of his discourse, while the Marquis regretfully turned his gaze from Polly—"my good neighbor Mr. Craigmore will show you another side of our Southern politics; he is what is called a rabid secessionist, a fire-eater, sir, a——"

Polly looked hopelessly towards the boys, whose eyes snapped at the situation.

"Uncle, it is twelve o'clock"—the girl faced him

with a warning finger—"and you have driven us all to our rooms by your horrid politics." She kissed him on both cheeks. "Come on, Aunt Mary; he's driven us away again."

De Layne bent and lightly touched his lips to her hand.

"To-morrow, Mademoiselle."

Polly blushed furiously, and gave a little nod of assent as she hastened from the taunting smiles of Robert and Joe.

It did not dawn upon Polly that the happy days and weeks that followed in lavish entertainment for the boys and their guests were pushing the Frenchman to an impatience difficult to hide. That behind his delight in her presence, in fact with the community in general, the desire for exciting diversion gnawed in unrelenting appetite, in fact to passion.

He missed the intrigues and hazards of his old life. He was ready at times to jeopardize the displeasure of his angry Sovereign for the sheer joy of outwitting him. But all adventures paled beside the excitement of gambling.

Through his affections for his Aunt, the old Countess, he had honestly striven against this master passion. "My dear Henri," she had wept, "would you deprive us of our power? Would you relegate our old age to poverty? our estates to crumble in ruins as you have left the home of your father's to do? Ah, mon Dieu! why will you not marry Julie de Livre, restore the château, and become a devoted husband?"

A wave of revolt had swept over him at the thought of Julie and money.

Yet even as his aunt's pleadings drifted through his thoughts, Polly strangely took the place of Julie de Livre. He started. Was it possible that he wanted to become a devoted husband after all? Had Polly really taken his heart before he had had time to calculate her wealth? To be sure, she had left some very rich crumbs for smaller flirtations among the rare galaxy of Southern beauties, for Polly was not beautiful. Her Roman nose, strong chin and broad high forehead, effective in Robert's face, was not pretty when reproduced in feminine design. And yet her mass of reddish-brown hair, her vivacity and ready wit, nay, brilliancy, pleaded a check to criticism.

He would not be ashamed to present her at court. In fact, by her unusual mentality she would form a screen to hide certain unsightly portions of his life. But why dwell on it? He would retrieve all his failures when he married her.

But she did not respond to his gallantries according to French custom. She was elusive, a constant contradiction. He thought her sentimental, when, contrariwise, she was practical. Nor did that young lady intend that the Marquis should know that since the gloaming of the first soft spring evening, when he had led her to the little jessamine-covered summer house, she felt the doors of her dream castle flung wide. And though she listened in rapturous fantasy, her self-esteem demanded a longer siege, a certain

amount of suspense and suffering on his part, that in the end he should really appreciate his victory.

Polly began to encourage attention from all her suitors, men she otherwise would not have troubled to entertain. From a budding "blue stocking," she blossomed into an arch-coquette.

For months Henri suffered the test of her tyranny. Returning late from a walk one midsummer afternoon, they sauntered over the lawn, turning as though towards the rose garden. By the Marquis' direction they crossed instead to the little vine-covered retreat near by. Instinctively the girl demurred, but Henri's voice softening enticed her to recklessness.

"See," she exclaimed as he brushed off the seat with his handkerchief, "the first star twinkles; make a wish."

"My wish is a prayer, Mademoiselle. Why do you hesitate?" He laid his arm on the rustic railing at her back. He leaned so that the depth of his gaze could reach every thought that caused the tardiness of her surrender.

"Think of Paris—of my consuming ambition to bow before my king and present a woman, my own wife, whose belle ésprit would resound to every corner of his kingdom." His voice fell to a tender note. "Think, ma cherie, of my aunt, your cousin, whose childless heart yearns to claim you as her own, and"—he leaned closer; she could detect a faint perfume mingling with the flowers about them—"do not forget my adoring heart pulsing at your feet."

But though her lover's pleadings gripped all the

chords of her heart, discretion held sway. Though she seemed to suffocate from ecstasy amid the odor of jessamine, almost to swoon from the joy beating within her breast, yet when expression found its way through her soft accent, she murmured:

"Ah, Monsieur, the picture is entrancing." The enticing of her smile made the arm at her back close softly about her waist. She gently removed it. "Not yet—not yet, dear friend." He withdrew his arm. "I cannot make up my mind to break the chains of my family life here. Halcome, my father's home, needs Robert; it must not longer remain closed; my duty—my——"

"But Paris! ma belle, Marie Elizabet"—he was the one person who called her as she was christened—"think of royalty itself among your following!" He was carried away by the possibilities of her prowess opening for him new fields of indulgence. He became excited, and greedy anticipation flashed through the eyes she had only known to languish with love.

"Who knows, the kingdom may hang upon the turn of your wisdom; our future would be a success that——"

Polly rose quickly, something sickened within her.

The Marquis caught her hand, inwardly cursed himself at the unguarded thoughts and, coaxing her to the seat again, poured into her vaguely disillusioned ears a stream of unselfish devotion.

Once more her heart mistook the sound of his voice for the mysteries of fate.

"My adored Marie Elizabet, we will never more

think of Paris. Halcome is the place of our residence. There we will make the welkin ring as it sounded in the days of your distinguished father."

His inconsistency was lost in the naturalness of the new scheme. She allowed the arm to remain about her waist this time; she would have spoken the binding words, but judgment, though fantastically garbed, remained.

"Speak, Marie Elizabet, speak and let me live."

"Not yet," she breathed. "Wait——"

"Why shall we wait, cherie? Is it——" An unhappy thought brought a tenseness to his mouth, but the girl only noticed a well-shaped hand nervously stroking a brown imperial. "Is it that you desire to retard your decision until after our visit to the Rutherfords," he laughed unpleasantly, "where from all parts of the country you will have a full list of your admirers in review for a week?" His face reddened, then darkened.

"Not exactly that," and behind the coquettish twinkle of her eyes, the sauciness of her face, he felt her braced by an intangible strength of discretion. "You see marriage is for a long time"—he almost lost control in his desire to kiss away the impudence of her knowledge—"and in order to make no mistake, I think that as this house party is to be composed of so many," she looked reassuringly, "it would be well to make a test before so irrevocable a decision."

Seeing his face darken, she added innocently:

"This applies quite equally to you, you know; for maybe after a week's continuous companionship with

Mamie Craigmore, or Sallie Lewis, or Mildred Hamilton, or Araminta Davis, you will be indebted to me for the opportunity of freedom."

"Impossible!" A wild gesture emphasized the exclamation.

"They are all prettier than I, you know." His gestures of denial were more emphatic than words. "Mamie is our State beauty; she is a splendid horsewoman, too; once she beat me to the brush, and——"

"Marie Elizabet—Marie." He leaned over and quickly kissed one of the little curls temptingly blown about by the soft breeze.

"Monsieur!" She drew back and her eyes flashed rebuke.

"Forgive, my adored one, and yet I care not that you forgive. Better to perish by your frown than live in another's smile." He walked up and down the small floor space. "We will go to Rutherford Manor to-morrow. I will stand for measurement with your Americans," then straightening in defense, "accept the challenge, and on the day of the tournament you shall mark whose hand lays the crown of love and beauty on these curls. I shall tower above all, because I love above all." Raising her hand to his lips, "Ah, I adore you, Mademoiselle."

CHAPTER III

LATER in the evening, young McAlpin from Savannah arrived to attend the house party and incidentally to act as one of Polly's out-riders on the trip. Polly Pockets devoted herself entirely to his entertainment. The Marquis could scarce contain his vexation.

It came to almost open anger next morning when the coach swung up to the door, and before Henri could dismount from his restless horse McAlpin handed Polly down the steps and into the carriage.

De Layne gave his steed a resounding cut that sent him plunging across the lawn.

Polly knew the fury that was driving him, but it did not check the soft smile that fell upon James McAlpin as he closed the door, and gave place to Mrs. Warner's parting word:

"Be sure to tell Cousin Laura that we are expecting all of them up for Commencement." She leaned in to kiss Polly, and softly admonished Aggie on the seat opposite: "Take care of your Miss Polly's clothes, and don't let them get scattered."

Henri had barely time to whisper in the other window, "Mademoiselle, you are cruel," before the heavy vehicle lumbered off and the dashing out-riders fell in place. In the distance the baggage wagon followed

as its shadow, with the mounted escort of black body-servants gayly chattering. Though Aggie sat in respectful silence, she took full note of the fair coquette as she smiled and bantered first from one window to the Marquis and from the other to McAlpin.

Twenty miles is a long way over rough muddy roads when the red clay sticks and pulls on the heavy wheels. And though the start was early, it was full midday dinner time when the coaches and horsemen began to arrive at Rutherford Manor.

For the first time since his landing in the new world, Henri experienced a feeling of excitement. The elusiveness of Polly kept him agitated. However, he consoled himself surreptitiously with Mamie Craigmore's loveliness, and even dared to whisper tender nothings to nearly every beauty of the party.

Polly listened to the sufferings of his heart which he poured into her ear, but she also noted his philandering attitude to others, especially Mamie. She felt no resentment, knowing herself responsible and believing Mamie enamored of Robert. It but increased her determination to test him thoroughly. She flirted as never before, "because," she kept saying to herself, "after the tournament when he crowns me, I will reward him. Until then it's good to make sure of him, good to be perfectly sure of myself."

But the week drew to its close before she realized it.

Fishing, hunting, all sorts of jaunts to neighboring plantations had absorbed the days. The morrow would

bring the tournament and the end of her self-imposed probation.

She noted with compunctions Henri's gaze fastened upon her during supper, and had not her engagements for the evening been prearranged she would have broken through her stoical test.

"Mademoiselle"—he followed her to the drawing room and under the candle light of the glittering chandelier detained her appealingly—"come with me under the wisteria if only for one hour; I am famished for a word."

"Pardon, M'sieur," and three young swains hurriedly joined them, "this is my hour, Miss Polly."

"Excuse me, it is mine."

"I beg pardon, it is mine."

Henri turned gracefully. "As there seems to be some difference of opinion, Messieurs, let me solve the difficulty and——"

"No, Monsieur," she rippled with girlish laughter, "you are home folks; these gentlemen are right; I purposely arranged this evening for——"

"This is my promenade, Miss Polly," a later arrival interrupted, and as she saw two others approaching exclaimed:

"I have an engagement with all of you now—and that engagement lasts for the whole evening." She smiled an all-inclusive smile, which kindled a spark of comfort in each anxious breast.

"Listen," she continued, "this is our last evening. I mean quiet one; to-morrow night the tournament banquet will destroy all the coziness of our visit"—

she paused with a sweeping appeal to each—"therefore, I thought it would be delightful if *my friends*"—instantly the personal equation repeated itself seven times—"would join me on the lawn under this wonderful moon, and let's serenade the rest of the party. Mr. Williams, with your guitar, and, Mr. Lawton, your violin, and Mr. Hamilton, your wonderful bass, and, Mr. McAlpin, your soulful tenor, and, Mr. Barrow, your baritone, which will lead us, while I follow with the contralto."

"That's all right for them, but what of me, Miss Polly?" Jim Russell asked half angrily. "Remember I can't turn a tune."

"Oh," she beamingly responded, "you are *my audience;* I am going to sing all your favorite songs to you."

The Marquis left the room. A thousand fiends were tearing his soul, and yet never had ambition so stirred him. Her power of sorcery at eighteen! "I can reach any pinnacle in France! Oh, to end this intolerable visit, marry her, and off to Paris!" What now should he do with his evening? He was disgusted with whispering inane sentimentalities into pretty ears, and fearful he had already gone beyond discretion with Mamie Craigmore—but she was so entrancing in the moonlight! Her coldness invited fanciful protestations, but if repeated they would incriminate him hopelessly! He must avoid Mamie.

It would be safer to talk politics with Mr. Rutherford.

Instead, however, of talking to that gentleman not

ten feet away on the side veranda, he walked out of the front door down upon the front walk, about the grounds with peeps at the occupants of cozy nooks, deciding which fair one he would entice from peace and content.

"Ah, pardon, Mademoiselle Davis," insinuatingly; "I thought Joseph was entirely alone."

"Naturally," she retorted censoriously. At this check upon his flippancy, the Marquis bowed in mock humility.

"I despise that man."

"'Sh, he will hear you." Joe raised his finger. "Don't say that; he is a wonderful man, a genius in fact."

"A genius? He is a villain and a gambler!" The tender eyes of a moment before were now lit with anger. "He is the most terrible influence that ever came among us; you are not the same person."

"Certainly not, dearest," taking the hand that was instantly withdrawn; "you would not have me remain an undeveloped boy always."

"Yes, I would, if by development, drinking and gambling—and splendid old Halcome turned into a gambling den, and——"

"Why——"

"Don't deny it! My brother-in-law has attended several of the Halcome affairs. Why, the Marquis de Layne has been in prison—he's a murderer, too."

"Dearest Araminta, do not litter your beautiful thoughts with such rubbish. It is true, everything you have said. But it was only a wild escapade that

missed fire! Henri did nothing vicious or terrible, except to kill the men, which he did in self-defense; but life is held very cheap in India. It would have been horrible for me to do that—but with Henri it is different. His rearing has been different—his life so adventurous and free that it is not just to measure him by our standards."

"And what of Polly? Is she to be offered on the altar of his innocent crimes?"

"Polly?" he laughed. "Why, Polly Pockets was never in love in her life. Her head will protect the straying of her feet. Look at her now"—and he pointed to Polly's coterie in the distance—"the Marquis is not even among them. That's the beauty of allowing girls to be literally born in society; it gives them a *savoir faire* and knowledge of men that keeps them from losing their heads with the wrong kind."

She shook her head ominously.

"I tell you, Polly likes that Frenchman better than you imagine. I wish you would warn her."

"Nonsense!"

Henri sauntered along among the trees, and flowers, and vines, and music, and love couples. Romance, romance everywhere and the full moon going like wine to his head, and the entrancing face of Mamie Craigmore, soft lit with smiles, literally wasting her sweetness on Robert! Unromantic Robert, who would just as soon be sitting beneath that bower of roses with his aunt! He advanced boldly:

"May a poor wanderer bide with you a moment?"

With the sound of his voice Mamie's face lighted.

The Marquis saw it, and judgment warned him to pass on. But his love of beauty, the environment, and his old recklessness held him—ensconced him in Robert's place.

"But, Monsieur, it is incredible," she demurred, "that any man, particularly you, could remain in the same house with Polly Pockets and remain heart whole."

"Ask your mirror, Mademoiselle, for my defense." He attempted to take her hand, but she quickly withdrew it and moved farther towards the end of the seat. "You will not let me touch your hand?"

"Of course not! You may be desperately in love with Polly and only flirting with me."

"What an accusation. What more can I say; surely I have left no vow unspoken?"

"Too true," she smiled archly, "but Southern girls never consider words of love—deeds are the only vows that impress us."

He sighed, while his mind flashed a comparison of womankind and her inconsistencies. These slips of girls that would have been chaperoned to the last degree in the old country were as free and able to protect themselves and control their suitors as women twice their age in other lands.

"Ah, beautiful siren that you are, name some danger that I may encounter."

"Danger is not necessarily a test."

"Then name your desires; give me some tangible deed, that in its performance I may express the torture of suspense. Name it, I implore you."

"The Marquis is wearing the colors of Polly Noy to-morrow, *n'est ce pas?*"

"*Certainement,*" he colored, "but she is my hostess; you would not have me commit a rudeness?"

"I have no suggestions to make; you assure me that you love me." Her eyes settled with a velvety sweetness on him.

"Ah, I am disconsolate! Is it that you would have me unappreciative? Also it is known that I wear the colors of Mademoiselle Noy."

"Monsieur le Marquis, you love Polly Pockets."

"Nonsense!"

"I can tell it by the way you pronounce her name."

"No, 'tis not true."

"Then prove it!" She sprang quickly in answer to Mr. Rutherford's call.

"Time's up—all come in—finish up to-morrow; come in." The host repeated good-naturedly.

"Stay, Mademoiselle, one moment; do not ask me publicly to renounce the colors of my hostess."

"All or none, M'sieur."

She ran across to Polly and her serenaders who were crossing the lawn, and by the time the front steps were reached the entire house party had gathered in a rousing "good night" song.

Henri did not join in the singing. A fear overcame him more terrible than when the iron doors of the Rajah's dungeon closed upon him. What if Mamie should confide to Polly? "Ah, Marie Elizabet, believe her not," he inwardly prayed.

Why had he attempted to match swords with these

innocent-looking child-women? The shrewdest diplomat would not have suspected such social acumen beneath such naïvété. Why had he tempted fate? Why would he always ensnare himself when the goal lay in sight, really in reach? "Ah, Marie Elizabet, it is not true; I love only you," he continued to mutter.

"Monsieur?" Polly called.

He sprang towards her and bent in dizzy confusion to catch her words, but Mamie slipped an arm around Polly.

"Come on, little Pockets; let's go dream we'll be queen to-morrow."

Polly turned from Mamie and looked up at the Marquis. "Yes, hope is a sweet lullaby."

"It is the only one," he whispered, pressing her hand unnoticed in the crowd, "that quells the dirge of despair."

"Shoo! little chickens." Mr. Rutherford wound his way in and about the congested doorway, and gently pushed the chattering girls towards the stairway. "Shoo—shoo!"

Henri's last glimpse standing at the bottom of the circular stair amid the knights of the morrow singing in all stages of sentiment was Polly's adored face with the background of Mamie's beauty above her.

Surely truth was stranger than fiction, he thought, as he found himself in his room. Little did he dream in the wilds of foreign jungles, when he placed for a curiosity some tiny kikeech berries in his watch charm, that he would ever consider using them himself.

He recalled the face of his valet in India, who ate one to avoid attending his master on a reckless adventure, timing the result of its violet nausea for the hour of starting. And now he must eat one of those despised berries, else how escape riding in the tournament? He could boldly disregard Mamie, wear Polly's colors, and crown her; but Mamie's anger, clothed in another garb, would wreck him. He looked with shame upon his knightly costume of light blue lying on the lounge. He shivered in disgust. "I who have faced death in battle, and in the perils of the jungles, even undaunted before an angry monarch, to be seeking cover under the most pusillanimous of artifices—and driven to it by two chits of girls in far-off barbaric America!"

CHAPTER IV

THE Marquis de Layne was alarmingly ill on the day of the tournament. For two hours all preparations for the festival ceased, but by high noon his sufferings abated, and the holiday hum arose again, unsubdued by anxiety for the distinguished guest.

The arrival of the band announced the hour of the jousts, and immediately the guests began to repair to the tournament grounds.

The invalid from a wide couch drawn up to the window watched the groups move gayly down the avenue of trees. He seized a pen and wrote an impassioned note to Polly, begging to be allowed to sit beside her in the coach on their homeward journey. He felt confident his physical weakness would appeal to her, and before Warner Mansion was reached he would gain her consent.

By mistake Robert received the note and handed it to his sister. He noted her depression instantly vanish into a mood joyous and jubilant. He became thoughtful and watchful, particularly next day, when the invalid languidly sat within the carriage and allowed himself to be tucked in and petted. Anxiety seized Robert to warn his sister against Henri as a lover. He threw himself into the coach on the seat opposite and watched with increasing alarm Polly's

attitude. The Marquis took in the situation and cloaked his disappointment with indisposition.

Robert chafed under the now too evident relations between them, and it was not until after they reached home and Polly had retired that he was free to steal quietly to her chamber.

"Is M'sieur ill?" She sat up, alarmed, as the light of her brother's candle revealed his troubled face.

"Not at all, not at all," he reassured her. "Aggie, put something around you and go into the hall; I want to speak privately."

"What on earth? Is Uncle or Aunt——"

"No, nothing; just wait." The door closed. "I want to talk to you about——"

"For heaven's sake, be quick! Something horrible is the matter—I know by the way you act—tell it quickly and end the suspense."

"It's about yourself, Polly."

"Me?" anxiety giving place to astonishment.

"I want to save you from a great unhappiness, a mistake, Polly."

"He placed the candle on the stand and seated himself on the side of the bed. "I'm afraid you are on the eve of making the blunder of your life."

"From your ministerial tone I presume you allude to marriage." She sank in relief on the pillows. "Your suspicions must be exceedingly vague; I'm sure I've shown no preference for any one."

"I mean de Layne." He spoke brusquely, and she instantly lost color. "Under no consideration could a woman marry him and expect happiness!"

"And you his friend?"

"Heaven knows I would not harm him, and I say in justice to him that for lovableness and generosity I have never seen his superior, but when you have said that—all has been said, all."

"Why, then did you bring him here?" The girl raised upon her elbow, and the flame in her cheeks heightened. "Why did you seek to interest me in him even before his arrival? You stated he was 'on marriage bent,' that he was so great, and grand, and brave, adventurous, brilliant, traveled, and everything else on earth you could."

"But I did not intend——"

"Oh, yes, you did; I've got yours and Joe's letters to prove it. If he was so splendid then, what have you found against him now?"

"I am to blame," he said desperately; "it was my fault, my fault. I was short-sighted, too dazzled myself in a foreign atmosphere to understand or take in his full character."

"What's the matter with his character?" little strangling sobs rising in her throat. "He seems to be doing only what you and Joe do. You admit he is generous; he is——"

Robert Noy trembled at the exhibition of his sister's feelings.

"He is," he burst out unreservedly, "but by nature, by environment, by everything on earth dear to us, he is different. He is wild, reckless, untamed—an exciting and glorious friend, but an impossible husband!"

"Love can conquer all that."

"Love cannot change a man's whole nature, any more than it can the color of his hair."

"Yes, it can; I'm not afraid."

"I tell you, Polly, he would break your heart within the year. I know your sensitive feelings and Henri would never understand you at all. He simply cannot be domesticated. Impossible!"

She lay back, relieved.

"Is that all you have against him? I have every confidence in my own powers to hold my husband."

He laughed in derision at the thought of one pitiful little woman's love controlling or even influencing the unrestrained nomadic heart of de Layne.

"Your powers!"

Polly was furious. "Go to bed, Robert." She turned her back angrily on him. "I never saw you serious before, and I never want to again. You are incapable of understanding man's love for woman! You are unbearable, silly, and I refuse to listen to another word."

"Great heavens! I wonder if the good Lord himself understands woman!"

He took up his candle, and Aggie returned to her pallet. A growing restlessness possessed Mary Elizabeth as doubt began to send little shivering needles into her heart. They pierced deeper, down through her stoutest defense and ended in sobs that ebbed through the dark hours.

"Aggie!" she screamed; "water, water!"

"Ter wash in—er ter drink, little Miss?" came the

half-awake response from the negro girl on the pallet.

"I'm dying—choking—quick!"

"Name er Gawd!" She hastened to the wash stand through the dark, stumbling against objects, and finally upsetting half the water on the bed.

"Heah, honey, take de cup, an' lemme fine de matches."

As the light from the candle fell on Polly's face, Aggie knelt anxiously beside the bed.

"Whar hu'ts yer, honey? Lemme rub hit fer yer."

In answer Polly leaned her head on the shoulders of her youthful maid and wailed pathetically.

Polly did not rise the next morning, head and eyes ached in sympathy with her heart. She would give the Marquis his answer this evening despite all warnings. She would rather be miserable with him than without him. She would not, however, appear until afternoon. She wished to avoid the family as long as possible. Aggie had told her the young gentlemen were at Halcome. They were always detained there until late. She would not think any more. After dinner she would visit Mamie Craigmore and find just how interested she was in the Marquis. A short time would suffice, after which she would return and sit in the memorable summer house and read until discovered by Henri. She went about her toilet singing—coiled the long, golden-brown plaits at the nape of her neck, with the blue bandeaux peeping in front where the hair was parted and fell in short curl clusters over each ear.

"Be sure, Aggie, to get my biggest hoop-skirt—I wish I had one as big as Mamie's new one."

"Lawd, Missey, yourn de bigges'."

"Oh, Aggie, you say that just to comfort me—I know it isn't—I never saw such a big one as she wore at the Rutherford's."

"Can't he'p dat; me an' her Tildy done already pass words 'bout dem hoops," she sniggered; "we done measu'e 'em, too—an' yourn leetle de bigges'."

"Oh, Aggie"—she looked lovingly at the little maid, though she tried to assume a shocked expression—"you shouldn't have done that."

Polly was a picture in her flounced muslin shirts, low corsage and white chip bonnet with a bouquet of apple blossoms on each side cuddling against the brown curls. She knew it.

Aggie threw a soft mantle over her shoulders.

"Lawd, Missey, hit's er shame ter kiv'r up yo' neck."

"Yes, I hate to, but when I return home it will be time to take it off."

She tied the long blue streamers of her bonnet under her chin, picked up her parasol and was out of the room, while Aggie was still in her last attitude of admiration. Down the steps she tripped, all but the last three. The laughter of gentlemen in the library stopped her. She hesitated undecided whether to run past or to tiptoe up again and go by way of the back. At that moment the eye of the Marquis caught hers; it held her as with flushed face he rushed from the cool, darkened room and leaned against the side of

the balustrade below her. She did not heed the jocular salutations of Robert and Joe. The expression spread upon the face of her lover, sent a crimson answer to her own. Doubt scattered like the mist. She knew that he loved her. Robert was all wrong; everything was wrong that sought to separate them.

He ceremoniously led her down the remaining steps, begging her to be detained in the library until he could rearrange his attire and accompany her. Her feet as they touched the thick velvet carpet were as though she trod on clouds.

Robert seized the opportunity of de Layne's absence to revert to his talk of the previous night. Araminta's warning flashed before Joe. He instantly joined forces with Robert. Polly, silent and angry, turned to the door. The Judge, entering at that moment, came face to face with her. His wretched expression that startled the boys was unnoticed by her. She turned back into the room.

"Request your aunt to join us, Robert," glancing hurriedly to see that the Marquis was not present.

"Uncle," began Polly delicately, touching her tears away and rearranging her bonnet before the big overmantel mirror, "I wish you——"

But she was interrupted by the husky tones of Judge Warner addressing his wife as she entered.

"I have here a letter from Louise de Garvie, warning me against de Layne, and particularly against any possible alliance with Mary Elizabeth."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Polly indignantly, but noting

the suffering on the old man's face, she threw herself upon his breast.

Gently but firmly he pushed her away.

"Have the kindness to sit quietly, Polly, until I read the letter."

Dismayed and speechless, the girl dropped into the nearest chair. The Judge took a seat near the window and nervously opened the letter.

"I am but recently from a bed of illness, dear cousin, caused by a conscious neglect to Robert and Joe during their visit to Paris. The continuous delay of my recovery is also attributed to the same perplexity of situation. Even now I cannot observe two courses of loyalty; I must either be false to a tenderly loved member of my husband's family, or risk the tragedy of a dangerous influence enveloping the lives of those nearest to you.

"How am I to write it against the sweetest, most generous of natures? But it must be done. It is this: Henri de Layne is a confirmed follower of the demon of Chance. He has squandered a princely fortune, beggared one of his friends, and left his ancestral estates in ruins by neglect.

"In spite of it all, he holds our affections by some unknown power, a power exerted over too many innocent lives. Alas!

"God forgive me that I am the channel through which he enters your home. I might have prevented it had I been candid to my young guests instead of loyal to Henri.

"Protect little Mary Elizabeth at all cost and forgive—try to forgive

"Your unhappy cousin,
"LOUISE DE GARVIE."

The door opened and the Marquis appeared.

"Come, Mademoiselle Mary Elizabeth, pardon me that I should so long detain you!"

Polly reached out her hand as if in answer to his request. He sprang to receive it, when the saucy little bonneted head fell back unconscious upon the soft-cushioned chair.

CHAPTER V

THOUGH Polly Pockets was saved from de Layne, yet her life now hung in the balance with typhoid fever.

Henri was honestly beside himself. Robert and Joe, feeling Polly secure from his influence, would have protected him from further unhappiness, but Judge Warner took the first opportunity to acquaint him with the full details of the letter.

The Marquis was aghast! He could not believe that his aunt, the one person who had excused, protected, even forced money from the tight-fisted old count, had betrayed him in the moment when his best resolutions were about to be realized. Yet there was her letter before him.

The disapproval of his host was not dissembled. The defense of his friends was so tainted with pity that he felt on the point of ending his life; for in the absence of money he was reduced to the humility of an encumbrance! Could he have been sustained by the love of Marie Elizabeth, he would have proved the good resolution that trembled for the first time upon the consciousness of his manhood. But alas, the blighting letter had left her stunned and hastened the development of fever that now threatened her life.

He took a pair of dueling pistols from his trunk.

They were historic in their record of success. He examined one of them carefully, unloaded, reloaded, and placed it in the pocket of his coat. His body-servant came in, looked at the half-empty case on the table, and, knowing from scraps of conversation let fall that a serious mystery prevailed, questioned the Marquis with his eyes.

"Hold your tongue. Put that case away and give me my hat."

Henri walked towards the back of the house, to evade anxious inquirers for Polly. He came on the back porch, where a group of servants surrounded Aggie, who had left the sick room on an errand.

The little maid's face was stained with tears. "She ain't dead, I tells yer! Me an' ole Miss ain' gwine let 'er die."

Henri's knees refused to support him; he half fell into a chair beside a table used for the preparation of cream and butter. He leaned an arm on its well-scrubbed surface, and glared unheedingly at the negroes. Instantly they faded from the porch, all but Aggie. Timidly she approached him, and in a trembling voice comforted:

"We ain' gwine let 'er die, Mars Marquis—I means, Mist'r Marq—I means, Lawd, I can't say what I means, but me and ole Miss gwine ter hole on ter her."

Henri clutched the table, and raised himself with both hands. The peeping servants fled farther. He walked slowly down the steps towards the grove in front. A slight détour led him to the summer house, where the perfume of blossoms brought his hand upon

his pistol. He cocked it, but quickly returned it to his pocket. Mamie Craigmore ran across the lawn to join him.

"Ah, Monsieur, I heard poor little Pockets was so ill—the house is full, let us sit out here awhile."

He stood unmoved, scarce hearing the invitation to sit beside her.

"Monsieur, what's wrong with you? You are troubled."

The cocked pistol in his pocket absorbed him. He stepped outside behind the vines to release the hammer of the weapon. Mamie followed him.

"Monsieur! Why are you carrying a pistol?"

Recklessly he faced her.

"Because, Mademoiselle, I am disgraced, and I seek a gentleman's only relief. Excuse me! but I must leave this bower; the odor is too heavy."

Mamie followed him over the acres of lawn, across the driveway, on down to a little path leading to a spring under a drooping willow just at the opening of the sugarcane patch. He seemed forgetful of her presence, though he now and again untangled her skirts from bushes and briars. They arrived at a bench under the tree, he handed her to a seat and placed himself beside her. He leaned forward and his hands fell dejectedly between his knees.

"Monsieur le Marquis"—Mamie's face was pinched with fear—"your life, it matters not what it is, belongs to me." The beating of her heart almost choked her voice. "I have saved it."

"You have but delayed the return of dust to dust—my life, like Cæsar's, was stealthily attached."

She longed to caress him like a little child.

"Tell it all to me—let me share your burden."

He looked wildly into the lovely face.

"It is disgrace, not a burden!"

"Whether burden or disgrace, I demand my share."

In obedience he told her of his aunt's letter and of his absolute unworthiness of life.

The girl laughed hysterically.

"Is that all, M'sieur? I thought you had committed something horrible."

"Is it not enough to be despised in a foreign land, to be penniless—without hope—without——" Once more he leaned over in desperation. A timid hand stole on his wrist.

"Henri, you said you could not live without me."

Her touch aroused his active mind, even in the midst of his despair. Might not the devotion of this girl be his means of escape? And before the plan was distinct in his mind he began to follow the suggestion of this hope.

"But I am too unworthy," he answered.

She spoke shyly but earnestly: "I cannot live without you."

"Leave me—do not tempt a desperate man."

"I am saving myself, M'sieur; let's go to Papa; he——"

"Never, Mademoiselle!"

She rose, he gently drew her back, raised his arm and kissed the hand upon it, toyed with the tapering

fingers, while he pleaded time for her to consider the rashness of her offer.

"Your father would never give his consent—Judge Warner would tell——"

"Then I would defy him; I would defy the world for you!"

He started to rise, but fell back heavily.

"No, I am a miserable coward! I dare not risk the danger of having you wrenched from me. He would never consent. Perhaps he would refuse me the house!" He covered his face with his hands to hide his exultation.

"Then we will marry without his knowledge. There shall be no risk—no danger—come."

CHAPTER VI

ATHENS had not recovered from the shock of the marriage before Mamie had gained her father's forgiveness, and induced him to establish the Marquis and herself at the Willows estate, a considerable plantation, just outside the city.

Henri bent all his energies to win Mr. Craigmore's regard. He threw himself into the burning political issue that consumed his father-in-law. In truth, Mr. Craigmore's exciting oratory and unsifted opinions appealed more to his mental unrest than the cooler logic of Judge Warner. Henri craved war—urged it at every political gathering and formed the "Napoleons," a company which became the pride of the county, and made himself the military referee of the village. In some way he managed to throw the glory of the "Little Corporal" about himself. He was the hero of the hour, he knew it, and for a time the excitement made him content. So long as reports from Polly's bedside were discouraging, and he felt that in death she would know the perplexities of his life, he was satisfied. But when after weeks the crisis had passed and life began softly its promise of health to Mary Elizabeth, de Layne became consumed with hopelessness.

Now at the end of months, the Willows became suicidal in its domesticity. Even with his growing in-

fluence throughout the section—the success of the plantation which his wife's self-effacement managed to throw to his credit,—he could not stifle the call of the gambler.

The seriousness of the Judge had sobered Robert and Joe—they were no longer companionable. They followed the hounds, and were enthusiastic officers in his command, but their recklessness had departed. Dread fastened on him with the loss of these kindred spirits.

The hope of forming a small inner gambling ring from the flower of his company was futile without them. He thought of perfecting such an establishment under his own roof. His wife would accept it as a military or political gathering. The continual visits of her family, however, made it unfeasible. He became morose, reckless, desperate.

His recourse in these dark moods was solitary rides across country. He was sympathetic with his vicious steed. Once when the beast refused a fence, plunged, reared, attempted to roll, he actually caressed it. He had taken fences and ditches at the snap of his kinspeople's whip until, like the horse, he would be forced no longer; he would take the bit between his teeth and find another way. He rode on, invoking all the spirits of evil.

Hope centered in arousing the dormant spirit of gaming in Robert, since that gentleman now had unlimited means in his control without censorship.

Young Noy's independence emphasized his own exile and vassalage. Desperation and anger shook him

to mania. He would be off at once to Robert—would force him to equalize the unfair division.

He lashed his horse, now jaded into gentleness, struck it again as the beast dragged wearily up the narrow lane of cherokee roses that bordered the peach and apple orchard of Halcome. He skirted the servants' quarters, and came by the mansion house to the office, a small one-room brick house snuggled in among the trees to the left, and entirely disconnected with the great house.

He found Robert in a worried search for a missing contract that his overseer was insisting had been returned. Neatly tied legal documents in small piles almost covered the broad flat top of the table.

Expecting no visitors, the master of Halcome did not notice Henri's entrance.

"Bon jour, Robare."

Robert looked up. "Ah, come in, Henri, and help me locate a paper that you will find marked on the outside, 'Contract with A. B. Watkins.' Look carefully through those deeds on the other side of the table. I don't see how it could possibly be there, but it might."

De Layne's anger vanished in the presence of his friend. He laid his hat and whip on a couch in the corner, and drew a chair to the table and untied the first package. Immediately his attention fastened upon a deed of twelve hundred acres of wild mountain land along the northern border of the state. A current started in the Frenchman's feverish mind that threatened to sweep his discretion.

Robert finally found the missing contract and plunged into explaining it to the overseer.

Henri made use of the time to master his excited emotion sufficiently to present successfully the scheme that was to save him. Already he was selecting his six followers, planning the style of his gaming den, which had forsaken the humbler structure and began to assume the architecture of a French châlet, a gentlemanly retreat far beyond even his extravagant fancies. It would be protected from feminine invasion, not only by the wild things of the forest, but by Indians as well.

"Well, Henri"—the overseer was dismissed—"I hear you and the Marquise are still cooing like doves." His eyes twinkled as he proceeded to replace with minute care the numerous piles of papers.

"On dit," replied the other with a shrug. Both laughed. Robert reached for the document that Henri still held open.

He handed the deed across the table.

"First read it, and then I will reveal a wonderful plan."

Robert scanned quickly, refolded, and replaced it with the others. He locked the box, and the bunch of keys jingled in his pocket.

"Well, what's the scheme?"

"Do you not see, *mon ami,* the wishes of your father?"

Without waiting for the other to speak, he outlined his plans which grew with his enthusiasm. The

younger man regarded him as a spoiled child asking for the impossible.

With patient indulgence he listened to the erection of a châlet in the mountains of the wild, the interior of which should be adapted for bachelor's convenience —a real retreat. There would be a long saloon room on one side, a sort of combination library, armory and gaming room. Reading, hunting and the passage of arms should divert the day, while small gaming should fill the evening hours. There would be a wine cellar of such quantity and quality as only a de Layne could command, while the crowning touch to the paradise lay in its protection by the jungles.

"But, my dear friend, we have all the shooting and more right on our own acres. Why burrow four days into the mountains?"

"Not great game, Robare, only such little fellows not worth the seeking." He secretly sorrowed that their points of view had parted by such an angle that he could not speak openly.

Robert laid a hand on the other's shoulder.

"You forget that I am but new to the management of my father's estate; that I must live a time at each of the plantations, in order to be in touch with their respective affairs. Why, I haven't time to build a log hut that far away, much less a châlet on the top of an inaccessible mountain."

"Ah," regretfully, "you will not understand! It is I who will build—will construct the entire châlet—everything—I only ask that you will generously supply

the cost. Also that none but our 'six' shall know of it."

His enthusiasm was not easily put aside. In fact, the earnestness with which Robert listened, though combatting every argument, convinced de Layne that the spark had caught, that the châlet was assured. Robert knew, too, that against his own judgment the wild fancies of the Marquis would end in concrete form—and he was glad of it.

"It is out of the question," he still urged, "for Joe or me to disappear from the world weeks at a time without a word to Uncle. Come, Henri"—the master of Halcome stepped out on the green sward—"I want to show you my cotton, biggest crop in years."

The Marquis lent himself to the dissertation on crops. He would bide his time—peg at it day by day, but in the end he would build the châlet. And he did according to the plans and specifications of his most ideal dreams.

CHAPTER VII

BY January of 1861 the pleasure house of Henri's imagination was a reality on top of Wigwam mountain. It was a substantial house, somewhat after the style of a French châlet, and contained a wine cellar, which was de Layne's particular boast. More than a year was consumed in its secret accomplishment—a year of great strain to the Frenchman, but filled with the excitement necessary to his happiness.

To all appearances his residence was at home, and none but the faithful Marquise, upon whom devolved the entire responsibility of the plantation, knew the many weeks of absence she hid from public gossip.

He, however, managed to be present at the christening of their son and at most of the important political gatherings, and was still conspicuous in military affairs. Though the strain was enormous, yet he was happy, was triumphant, for he was able to hold Robert loyally to the scheme. But Joe, under the growing influence of Araminta Davis, became restless and distrustful, often hostile to the whole plan. Nevertheless he had promised to celebrate the opening of the lodge and could be depended upon to keep his word.

However, political events had reached a crisis, and with one accord they determined to await the Milledgeville Convention, which they knew would be a history-

making gathering, where the final grapple between the Conservatives and Secessionists would end in the old State leaving the Union. It was, therefore, the middle of March before the party was ready to set out for Wigwam.

Joe reluctantly consented to go with Robert a day in advance, to be at the châlet as hosts when the party arrived, and, having given his word, was eager to start and have done with it. Therefore, one morning by sunrise they were well out of the environs of Athens. Zeek and Tom trailed sleepily behind their masters, who rode on without exchange of words.

"For heaven's sake, Joe"—Robert touched his horse —"whip up and cheer up. You make me feel as if I were going to a funeral."

"I feel as though I were."

"Bah, if we had wanted Araminta's ideas, we'd have brought her along!" He testily snapped his whip, and both horses started in a run. They gave rein for a mile or more, and continued the rest of the day in a peevish silence.

The turn of the third day brought them in the sight of the mountains. The road, difficult an hour back, was now entirely lost. Either they had deserted it in making a détour, or it had definitely stopped. At all events they hopefully followed in Indian file, a cow trail, trusting it would lead to shelter before the sun went down. The sound of owls and the call of wild things added to their discomfort.

Joe stopped. All the others stopped. Each man

turned in his saddle to reconnoiter. The wilderness before—the wilderness behind.

At this moment a crackling of twigs caught their ears. "A bear!" grasped the minds of all. Guns were swung into position, and with steady aim they watched the direction.

A tall mountaineer, somewhat advanced in years, appeared. He moved his tawny hands in a kind of swimming motion as he protected his head from low-hanging boughs. Instantly the guns fell in place again.

"What's a-ailin' of ye?" he drawled, unabashed by the military array.

"We've lost our way and, hearing without seeing you, we prepared to protect ourselves."

"Thar hain't s'many b'ars and pant'ers down here, but up yander," pointing towards Wigwam mountain, "hit's a sight of a place for varments up thar."

"Would you direct us to a house where we could pass the night? We are off the road——"

"Jest keep right on afore ye, tell ye comes to my son's house at the eend of this path; he hain't got s'much room, but the Gray Eagle hain't never turned a man out in the mountains at night yit."

An hour brought them to the foot of the mountain, and to the front of a cabin. In the blazing light of a bonfire before this cabin, they saw a man and a woman in the process of sticking and skinning a bear.

The man held a knife dripping with blood between his teeth, while he pulled at the skin on the huge head.

At the bark of the dogs he sprang to his feet, blood

streaming from hands to elbows. In a twinkling some five or six children appeared in the background. In the door of the cabin the lithe figure of a girl was also outlined against the light from the big hearth fire.

John Mason, the father, was a man over middle height and rawboned. His weather-beaten features bespoke fearlessness. His face, partly covered by beard, was singularly handsome, particularly the dark eyes that glittered like an eagle's. He removed the knife from his teeth and held it away from his well-worn mountain jeans. Though the house consisted of but one room and an open lean-to shed, the Gray Eagle welcomed them.

"Light, strangers, won't ye?"

They needed no urging. He completed the skinning of the game and the girl made ready a crude meal.

The gentlemen watched her fawn-like grace as she moved about. The coarse homespun dress clung about her, revealing perfection of proportion. She had full red lips that constantly broke into smile whenever a near-collision was averted between the smaller children continually under her feet. The brown hands managed the hot cooking utensils at the hearth fire with deft grace.

"Run yander, Eb, an' git me er mess er aigs under Pap's bed."

During the meal Minnie waited upon them, as with accustomed servitude to the male. Her demeanor was modest and unconscious, yet now and again a blush overspread the tanned cheeks, already tinted with life,

when "the pretty gentlemen" answered the admiring look in her eyes.

Supper finished, they were about to repair to the horse shed for the night, when the host invited them to accompany him to the spring, "while the 'oomen folks gits to bed."

The boys looked questioningly at each other as the "Gray Eagle" continued, "Then we'uns kin turn into my bed."

The embarrassed men would have preferred the shed or loft with their servants, but, respecting the customs of the mountains, yielded.

Next morning breakfast was eaten by the glow of the hearth fire. They did not, however, start up the mountain until the sun gave them equal vision with beast or Indian.

Robert kept near the father and tried to avoid the girl's great romantic eyes that followed him continually.

"Is there no road ascending the mountain?"

The Gray Eagle removed his quid to the other side of his jaw and spat.

"Why, thar's a road er leetle over three mile from here—hit's the one that 'furriner' blazed when he was er haulin' truck up thar. But if I was you'ns, I'd jist cut ercross thar through the woods an' blaze m'way as I wint."

He removed the bearskin from the ground where the wind had blown it, and threw it again on a bush.

"Ebenezer thar kin go with ye as fur as the creek, if he's a mind to."

The urchin made to the shed for a mule and returned almost within the minute riding bareback and without a bridle. He led the party through the unbroken forest. They had gone but a short distance, picking their way over disjointed rocks and laurel thickets, when Minnie came running and springing like a deer. They haulted for her message, but as none came Ebenezer vouchsafed:

"She jist come to walk along a spell—she knowd ye hosses couldn't walk as fast as her through all this bresh."

Robert sprang from his mount, and to the disgust of Joseph exclaimed:

"Yes, I think it is pleasanter walking than scratching one's face on the trees."

Joe cleared his throat and Robert, taking the rebuke, left off making remarks. However, her act touched him, particularly the innocence of her silent curiosity.

Joe became restive. Minnie was too picturesque in the woodland setting. He spoke almost roughly.

"Well, Ebenezer, I see quite an opening ahead. I think we can find our way all right now. Thank you and Minnie for piloting us thus far."

"Why, we'uns wus a'gwine with ye fur up as Buzzard's roost rock. Wusn't we, Sis?"

Minnie nodded.

"Couldn't think of allowing it," emphasized Robert. Noting the girl's disappointment, he added: "You are afoot, you see; it's too long."

Without ado his cousin started on, and Robert, after a hurried adieu followed.

Soon from time to time the gray green gables of the châlet showed in full view of de Layne's masterpiece. It was built of native rock, and the low, graceful proportions stretched out under the sweeping boughs of the pines as harmoniously as if it had been a part of nature's plan. But in the stillness even their quiet arrival aroused the dogs. Their noisy greeting summoned the servants, who came running and grinning, happy that their lonely days were over. Joe listlessly followed Robert from room to room as he praised the ornamentation and furnishing of the lodge.

He was in no mood for the promise of revelry, and the sight of the gaming tables filling the center of the long sitting room disgusted him. These sports were certainly not an ennobling occupation, especially when the country was in its most serious crisis. Araminta's protesting face rose before him, he put it aside, but the preparation for dissipation exhibited in every room brought it again and again, and in his heart he felt that she was justified.

Next morning he acquainted Robert of his changed opinion of de Layne and his desire to return to Athens.

Robert railed against the insanity of love sickness. and Araminta's reiterated prejudices against de Layne. "Even though you feel her to be right, stand by your guns until she surrenders, then be magnanimous."

The discussion continued by fits and starts for the most part of the day, and only concluded by the startling interruption of guns firing.

They rushed to the front of the house, and arrived

in time to witness the noisy approach of the Marquis and his party.

Trays of mint julips appeared as by magic. De Layne sprang up the steps and appeared at the back of his host, shouting above the din of barking dogs and stamping horses:

"Again, friends, a heel tap! Long live Robert Noy! Fresh glasses! Once more—long life to Robert, the bachelor; may his freedom last forever!"

Thus began the revels which continued until checked by the weakness of flesh. The Frenchman, though somewhat affected by the intoxicants he had been obliged to drink when the eyes of others were on him, yet managed to remain sufficiently himself to continue master of the situation.

Consider his surprise when he turned from the scene of the debauch into the cool air of the night, to be confronted by Joseph—cold, sober, and frowning.

"You are in no condition to talk to-night, but to-morrow I will make it plain to you that Robert and I wash our hands of this life entirely." Without waiting for reply, he entered the house and retired to his room.

Henri did not move for several minutes. How had Joe secreted himself through the excitement of the afternoon and evening? Never was de Layne's mind more active in cunning. Robert to leave him! The châlet closed before it was really christened? He would see—he had outwitted Joe before, he would do it again. He followed Warner's example, retired and slept.

Joseph breakfasted alone next morning. He took a long walk around the crown of the mountain, exploring the numerous outhouses attached to the lodge, but it was difficult to restrain his impatience to awaken his cousin and be off.

But when Robert awakened, he was in no mood to "be off." He insisted "he was an ill man and needed nursing and not travel."

Joe berated himself into a fury. He had his horse saddled and, with his faithful Zeek, started to return alone.

Henri with a teasing, ill-concealed merriment began speeding his departure.

Warner, livid with rage, turned in the doorway and challenged him to duel.

"I will meet you on the field of honor, Josef, but I will not raise my hand; how can I? My life is yours for the asking!" His voice trembled. "Forgive if I have offended; the head, not the heart, *bon ami.*"

Joe dismissed his servant and returned to his cousin. It was dastardly to leave Robert, he would remain as he had promised.

His presence, however, was as a ghost at a feast. Henri ingeniously humored him, and ended by almost entirely substituting hunting for gambling.

Warner became almost contented. He constituted himself master of the hounds—led the chase untiringly, hoping by exhaustion to create a demand for early hours.

At the end of two weeks, on the day before their intended return to Athens, Robert lagged behind the

hunters, insisting to Henri, who urged him, that it was better wisdom to devote the day to sobering. Fearing to anger Joe, Henri insisted the more, guaranteeing that by the travel of an untried bit of route to sober him in less than an hour. His host garrulously and unwillingly followed him.

He dashed towards the most perilous descent of the mountain. Robert plunged after, and together they took gullies, small precipices—sliding on loosened rocks, half rolling, half tumbling, on, on, down and down, until they fetched up at the bottom of the mountain, horses and men foaming and mixed together. At the edge of Tiger Creek a merciful bed of moss saved an accident. Exhausted they threw themselves on its soft cushion.

Dazed for a moment or an hour, neither knew, they regained their horses and proceeded slowly around the foot of the mountain. At the bend of the creek, which turning formed the baptismal pool of a primitive meeting house on the opposite bank, Henri drew back and called to his companion:

"Mon Dieu, Robare, retire; do not spoil the picture!"

On a swinging foot bridge that spanned the stream a short distance from them, a mountaineer was urging with tender force a barefoot girl. From the slatted sunbonneted head to her brown, hardy feet she presented the poetry of coquetry. They were too distant to hear.

"I hain't a'gwine to do hit, Jerry—I done found out I hain't never loved ye nohow."

"How come ye to let me fetch the Jestice here to marry us, then." He turned to wink at that jeans-clad representative of the law standing by the meeting house.

" 'Caze I never had no chance to git no word to ye, so I gist come to tell ye that I done changed m'mind."

"All right, honey, you done changed ye mind—come along and let the Jestice change ye name fur ye."

He pulled her ashore step by step.

"I hain't a'gwine to say yes, I——"

She turned her head for one moment in their direction. Henri saw her face.

"A sylvan Venus! I hasten!" He plunged his horse into the creek.

The Justice ran to meet the couple.

"Jerry, will ye take her fur ye wife?"

"I come a'purpose fur that," grinned Jerry, his fingers clutching the girl's arm.

"Will you take him, Minnie?"

"No, I won't—I done told——"

Henri forced the head of his horse in the midst of the group. Jerry raised his arm and caught at the bridle. Minnie's bonnet fell off. Henri jerked his horse back, which reared, almost striking him against a tree. He called to Jerry:

"Do not urge the child against her will; I will purchase your freedom, little one," smiling with open admiration at the frightened girl who again tugged at Jerry's grip. "Give the maid her choice I——"

Before Jerry's snarl could manifest itself in words,

Robert's horse, tearing up mid-stream, dashed in front of the Marquis.

"Out of my way, Henri! Release that girl, boy!" For when the face of Minnie was revealed, the picturesque child in the forest tangle flashed before Robert, and chivalry under the stimulus of whiskey deepened into quixotism.

"Keep out of this—'tain't none of your business." But the ruffian released the girl, who fled to the side of Robert's horse.

"It's my business to protect the helpless." And, dismounting, he placed an arm about her trembling shoulders.

Inspiration flashed upon Henri. Such an entanglement would bind Robert to the mountains—to the châlet—and to him!

"Why do you force the lady?" He turned to the mountaineer. "Don't you see she prefers this gentleman's protection?"

Instinctively the brute caught his meaning, and with an ugly leer replied:

"I axes ye to excuse me! He air the very feller I'm er lookin' fer." Robert, amazed, opened his mouth to speak, but the enraged man was before him.

"She hain't been right since you stayed at her house —me an' her——"

"Silence!" Robert moved to strike him, but the girl clung to him.

"He'll kill ye."

Henri intervened: "Hear what's on his mind."

Robert's nostrils quivered. "I'll not hear his vile slander."

Henri caught the blow intended for the man, while the girl clung pleadingly to her hero.

The man continued:

"She hain't taken no notice of me, not since ye was thar, I tell ye—afore that she promised to marry me—right here ag'in the time the Jestice come by the Meetin' house."

The girl trembled anew, while tears trickled down her face.

"I'm afeerd er Jerry—an' I hain't a'gwine ter marry him nuther."

"You shall not," spoke the outraged gentleman.

"Her Paw would kill ye if I tole him I wouldn't marry her." He crept closer, lowering his voice. "Somebody's got ter marry her, 'caze the Jestice is done here. Ye better turn her over ter me 'caze ef I wuster tell her Paw how I seen your arms wropt all eround her, he'd kill ye quicker'n he would er b'ar."

Minnie began to cry.

"I'd ruther be kilt than jined onto ye."

"I'll fix ye," he sneered, doubling himself like an animal, "and I'll fix him, too."

"If ye wuster lay ye hands on him, Jerry Watkins, I'd kill ye!" She sprang like a tigress towards him, but Robert caught her back.

"Rather let me protect you, Minnie!"

Eyes that glinted on Jerry with the fierceness of the wild melted timidly when turned to him. An involun-

tary something faintly answered. Jerry writhed. He crept close, almost intervening his head between them.

"Ye better turn her over ter me while I'm in the notion."

Meantime the Gray Eagle was returning from the County seat with his father and brother. As they came in sight of the meeting house old man Mason said:

"Do ye reecollect what's liable to be a'gwine on now t'other side of the meetin' house, John?" He winked slyly. "Come on; less go see Jim tie the knot."

"No, me an' her maw married 't'out enybody er eyin' of us, an' I'll do the same b'her."

The report of a gun! One and all rushed in the direction of the sound.

Jerry, freeing himself from a tussle with Robert, had sprung to the Marquis' gun resting against a tree, and pulled the trigger. Henri as quickly had knocked the barrel upward as Minnie threw herself as a shield upon Robert.

Livid with anger, the arrivals clutched their guns, while the Justice, a man of the mountains, born to the instinct of clan's rights, turned his back to allow the Gray Eagle to settle his affairs.

Jerry with incoherent rage, his mouth sputtering a bloody saliva, raved:

"He's been er wroppin' his arms all 'round her—him er furriner, an'——"

The Gray Eagle's clan leveled their guns.

"Git ter work thar, Jestice," came tensely from John Mason; "I give ye the best I had onct, Mr. Noyer

—an', by G——, I'm gwine ter have the best ye've got now."

Robert stepped forward to speak.

"Git back thar—I hain't er list'nin' ter nobody but the Jestice."

The courage of the Noys was written upon Robert's livid face.

"John Mason, I propose to speak, though a thousand cowardly guns were thrust at me."

Instead of the flash of ammunition, which would usually have answered such an insult, the mountaineers listened.

Jerry slipped to the head of the Gray Eagle's horse. "I told him, John, I'd tuk the gal, an' I'll stand by hit now. Turn him loose an' I'll marry her."

"Silence!" thundered Noy. "I want to say to you that I have protected your daughter as I would any helpless woman—I want you to know that I still intend to protect her from that scoundrel and, if necessary, from the inhumanity of her people."

A restlessness among the horsemen proved something of the situation was dawning.

"I do not propose to allow her or myself the ignominy of armed insistence."

"I don't understand ye—what do ye mean?" The Gray Eagle recognized a man, but not his words.

"I mean for those guns to be lowered." His command brought results. He turned to Minnie, who was awe-stricken at his boldness.

"Will you marry me?"

She nodded her head.

Robert placed himself beside her. "Proceed, Justice."

The last words of the Justice's unique ceremony still lingered, when the face of Joseph Warner appeared through the boughs over the swinging bridge, the others hurrying behind.

The Gray Eagle and his clan left as the gentlemen of the châlet arrived. Then slowly up the mountainside they proceeded—the barefoot girl on Joe's horse, the rest taking turns in walking.

It was a solemn wedding party that gathered about the evening board. The embarrassed Minnie, unaccustomed to sitting at meat with the men of her house, would fain have served. The gallantries of "the furriners" confused her. No toasts were drunk. The wonderful wine cellar was as though it had sunk into the bowels of the mountain.

One late afternoon two weeks later, a child brought a soiled piece of yellow paper addressed to "Noyer." The writing was almost in hieroglyphics, but with combined effort it was deciphered into a challenge for Robert to meet Jerry at the old Bee Gum tree down by the creek. The crowd treated it as a jest. Minnie did not join in this—she knew Jerry, and she was certain now of what she feared all along, Jerry was on Robert's track.

"If ye'll jist let me meet him."

"Nonsense, I will settle him once for all, if you really fear him," and Robert seized his gun from the rack and strode in the direction of the Bee Gum tree.

Realizing the recklessness of the act, the others with

Minnie found guns and followed, she, however, making a swift détour by an unknown trail. They were scarce beyond the sight of the châlet when a number of shots rang in quick succession.

Robert fell immediately. From the darkness, somewhere, Minnie reached his side.

"I hit Jerry, but I never kilt him; Lord, I wush I could a'kilt him. Whar 'bouts did he bead ye?" Running her hands over his chest, she felt the dampness of blood. "Oh, Lawd a'Mighty!"

Robert tried to talk lightly, but speech was difficult. He sought to save his strength to give directions to Joe.

Late in the quiet of the spring night when the others returned from their fruitless search for the assassin, they found Joe and Minnie silent beside the dead.

Next morning the news of the fall of Fort Sumter reached the châlet.

The impassable roads, the sickening heat of April, grief that seemed to leave the faculties dead to everything save the distracting agitation of war, decided them against the removal of Robert's body. They would leave him in the bosom of old Wigwam for the few short months of strife.

But Minnie! How to fulfill the promise to educate her before taking her to Athens? The proclamation of war disrupted the plans that Robert had made with his latest breath. Judgment urged a postponement, but feeling made Joe determined at all cost to carry out his cousin's wishes.

He would talk it over with Minnie. She looked so

little and forlorn as she crouched beside her lifeless hero. In spite of her early maturity she seemed less than her sixteen years, and yet she possessed a character that crude speech and ignorance could not hide.

The call of home, the consolation of humble friends sounded uppermost in her grief. "To git shed er furriners, an' go back ter Maw."

But even this hunger for lowly conditions in no way lessened the responsibility she felt towards the new life confronting her. She would meet every demand. "But not yit—not yit."

"Minnie"—Joseph stroked the head of the figure still kneeling beside the dead—"you know Robert wanted you to go to school."

"I couldn't learn nuthin' now." She looked up in tearless grief. "Let me be for awhile."

"Then will you go home with me?"

"I can't go nowhurs now."

"Polly will love you—she will help you, Minnie."

"No, I'd ruther stay here fur awhile."

"I'm afraid the Gray Eagle will not deal gently with you."

"Yes, he will." Pride for a moment pierced through despair. "Pap seen Robert was as big a man as him." She relaxed again. "I jist can't go ter no furrin parts now. Atter while whin I studdies on the books he give me, an' goes ter school sumwhurs, I'll come an' stay with his folks, but I can't do it now."

"The war will be over in a few months, Minnie." He again stroked her hair, letting his hand smooth

down her cheek. "God, sparing me, I will return for you the first thing before I go home."

"I'll do it, Joseph, atter the war. I'll be a furriner jist like ye be; I know I kin make er lady out of m'self; I know I kin; jist let me be now is all I axes ye."

With the money they had used in gaming, together with Robert's watch and small jewelry, they left her to maintain herself for the few months of the war. And while they rushed to the call of the Southland, Robert Noy and his proud name were left in the Hills with Minnie.

END OF PART I

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

THIRTY-FIVE years had passed since Joseph Warner closed the châlet and hastened with the frenzied Frenchman to join the army of the Confederacy. It was also nearing the thirty-fifth anniversary of de Layne's reckless dash at the battle of first Manassas that glorified his name, and left him among the dead of that brilliant victory.

Even longer it seemed to Joseph Warner since he turned his gaunt face southward from Appomattox Courthouse, a ragged Confederate Colonel with the farewell of General Lee aching in his heart. The open road, with a lift every now and then from some passing wagon, had been good enough for men returning to a land of desolation and a lonely grave on a pine-crested mountain.

Though the University had mercifully escaped the invasion of the enemy, and Warner Mansion stood with its doors appealingly to him, yet he had felt he must fulfill his promise to the dead, Minnie—he must find her! Many days did he and Zeek tramp over the mountainous vicinity of Wigwam, only to hear when meager news could be had, that "her folks is moved

away." And lastly that "She's been dead for a'gwine onto three years."

Trudging on, hungry and weary, they had climbed to the grave under the pines, and borne away the mortal remains of Robert Noy—home, and to Polly.

The youthfulness of Joseph Warner did not survive that home-coming thirty-five years ago. His hair steadily whitened, and over his war-sterned features gloom had hopelessly settled. Not even his marriage with the well-poised Araminta Davis, nor the smoothness of his subsequent career, nor the success of his son Robert (named for the lamented Robert Noy), seemed to lighten the seriousness of his life. Stern and melancholy, he was aloof from all. Only Miss Polly Pockets dared infringe upon his dignity.

But Miss Polly was privileged. She belonged to Athens, and Athens belonged to her. It mattered not the change of season or style, her wide hoop-skirted dresses, containing more pockets than ever, seemed perennially in vogue, and for all her fifty odd years she still dictated the social policy of the County from her plantation home, Halcome.

It needed just her independence and common sense to cope with the changing situation. For changes had come over Athens more rapidly than the years. Since the war, the adjustment of small incomes to large establishments had wrought many transformations from the original settlement. Many of the old mansions were desecrated by college boy boarders. The pier glasses reflected hungry, overgrown boys struggling to get through four years of their life with as

much fun and as little study as could be made to produce a college degree.

Warner Mansion was among the few old places that had weathered the reconstruction period. It seemed to look reproachfully at the architectural excrescences progress had thrust against the stone fence surrounding it, while an expression of hopelessness appeared to settle about the less fortunate homes which from financial vicissitudes had foot by foot surrendered their acreage until the japonicas and magnolias, aye, even the fruit trees of the garden were forced to bend their blossoms over the modern bungalow, or some flaring painted gable.

Miss Polly shrewdly recognized the signs of a new era, and faced about to adjust conditions to meet these influences of life in the new South. She delicately manipulated the "proud poor," and with equal deftness assorted the newcomers so that in spite of "Oh's" and "Ah's" they mixed and mingled to mutual advantage. Though her weapons were felt in the interest of advancement, she guarded the old, which was ever on the defensive, ever admonishing, slowly retreating day by day back to the dignity of the past.

Colonel Warner had no sympathy with Polly's up-to-date way of looking at things, and yet since the death of his wife she was his only congenial companion. Her visits, which were usually paid "between crops" at Halcome, were his sole diversion, even though Miss Polly clashed with him upon every subject, and especially his self-imposed loneliness. She insisted that young Robert and his family should make

their home at Warner Mansion. But his son's wife was too fashionable, the children too modern and noisy. The change would bring about an upheaval that would cost him the peace of his old age.

But would it? Had he not already nursed the sorrows of life too long and deeply? Could Polly be right? He must talk it over with her again, many times. She must prolong her visit for this purpose, he would seriously consider the change.

He rode slowly up the avenue leading to his door, and noted the grudging hand of winter still pinching back the trees and flowers. He felt himself in strange sympathy with the mood of the season.

Was he not delaying another spring-time in the old mansion? The voices of his son's children and their mamma would break the spell of melancholy that dwelt within the silent halls. And yet, like winter, he clung to his cheerlessness, clung to the privilege of brooding in sequestered freedom throughout the hallowed chambers.

He pulled his horse from a wheelbarrow in the driveway.

"What's the matter, Joe? Your horse lame?" and Miss Polly Pockets rose up from a bed of hyacinths she was trying to coax into bloom.

Colonel Warner threw his rein to Zeek, who immediately relinquished the hoe he had been using under Miss Polly's direction.

"Don't work in the flowers any more, Polly; it's too late. Come, I'll help you up the steps."

"Help who up the steps? Look here, boy; I don't

care if I am fifty-three years old; I've got more vitality than any of these new-fashioned people."

And, indeed, she looked it, with her color heightened from exercise and the little curls that used to hang in brownish gold sauciness about her ears now shaking their fluffy gray in gesticulative emphasis. She held the trowel, and her earth-covered fingers, far from the gathers of her full skirt. She produced a miniature soap box from a back pocket.

"Here, Joe, you come and turn this spigot on, so that I may wash the dirt off, and then," she looked mischievously, "you can reach in the third pocket on my right-hand side and get my handkerchief."

"Mercy, no!" A faint smile broke over his saddened features as he quickly proffered his own handkerchief. "I would never risk the intricacies of your pocketed skirt."

They sat for some minutes upon the veranda in silence. Miss Polly reached into another deeply hidden pocket and brought out a nail file and buffer. She purposely kept her eyes on the process of manicuring as she announced:

"My agent, James Davis, wrote me a letter regarding the châlet a week ago," she spoke rapidly. "He went up into the Hills of Habersham on some lumber business, which happened to be near the châlet, and he took the liberty of examining the premises. Shall I read his letter?" She dived into her "letter pocket."

"No, you can tell it just as well."

"He says the preservation of the place is wonderful. Of course, it needs paint, and some of the wood about

the porch and steps are rotting, but on the inside—for he opened a window and went through—he says it is absolutely intact. The chairs are even standing where the occupants left them. The wine cellar was wide open, and yet not a bottle out of place!"

The old gentleman was speechless.

"Yes," she continued, "an unfinished letter from my brother to me was on the desk in his room. He was urging our good-will and tenderness to Minnie." She braced herself against the rising sobs. When she began again, her voice was steadied by the practical conditions. "Davis said the timber prospects are enormous—virgin forest. A railroad now runs within a mile of the châlet, at the foot of the mountain. There is no station, of course, but you and young Robert could easily remedy that."

"I fail to understand the supernatural protection of it," he said hoarsely.

"That's just it, it is supernatural. But there is a natural explanation for it. An old 'conjure' woman has been living in one of the distant cabins attached to it, on the ledge of a precipice called 'Witches Head'; I think that's the name, I'll look and see."

"No, let the letter alone; I know the place."

"Well, he learned that this old hag impersonated a ghost around there at stated intervals; at all events, she has protected the place from the superstitious mountain people, who go a mile out of their way to avoid crossing any portion of our land. "What I wanted to say was this: I cannot afford to have so much money tied up any longer. It is foolish—me,

a lonely creature who ought to be looking out for dimes and nickels."

"Why, Polly, you are growing penurious."

"Not at all; I've got to be thinking about myself when you are dead, and the wolves begin to prey on me as they do on all defenseless women."

"It would be a rich sight to witness the scuffle between you and the wolves, Polly." He actually smiled. "The beasts would find they had met their Waterloo."

"Aren't you ashamed, sir?" She gathered energy with the thrust. "Now, listen; I want you to buy the châlet from me, or buy half of it. You know it would be impossible for us to let it be owned by an alien. I am willing to set the price at twenty-five thousand, and let you have the whole or half, or let Robert have a third, or any way you desire; only with the provision that it shall be used as a summer home for the family."

"Never the latter; I will purchase the whole, and let it remain as it is."

"Joe Warner"—she returned her manicuring articles to the proper pocket and spoke with nervous irritation—"can't you see that I am trying to lead up to something? Are you so absorbed in your melancholy that you cannot see that your own son is working himself to death? Do you understand?"

"I do not. I know that Robert has made a success in life, so far, but he has never been ill since childhood."

"Well, then you are stone blind, for everybody in town is talking about how fearfully he looks." She

changed her tactics with his alarm. "But Dr. Westmore has examined him, and says he has no organic trouble; that is, if he will stop work and go away. If not——"

"Come," he shivered, "let's go in; it is too early to sit out."

She followed talking rapidly:

"Dr. Westmore says the châlet is the very place for him; up there in the pines. There is no reason why Robert and his wife couldn't go up for a couple of years' rest—both children are young enough to miss school for that length of time, for I would go up very often and keep them coached in their studies, and, oh, yes, I had almost forgotten! You must consent to Robert and Mildred's breaking up their home and moving their things over here; you cannot live alone."

"Impossible."

"What's impossible?" asked Robert Noy Warner, entering the door.

Miss Polly looked relieved. "That your father should live here alone; this place is rightfully the headquarters for your family."

"Cousin Polly is right, Father, and Mildred is ready and waiting to come whenever you give the word. It seems to me that you would want to have little Araminta around. She not only bears Mother's name, but she has her face as well—and then little Billy——"

"Whose name should have been Robert Noy." The old man's piercing eyes looked regretfully from beneath the fringe of gray brows. "You knew that it

was my wish that every generation of my family should continue the name of Robert Noy."

"But that's not the question now." His son was anxious to get away from the sore subject. "What I want to know is why you refuse to allow me to move my family over here?"

"Well, to begin with, you have just completed your own home."

"Nonsense, a thousand modern homes could not take the place of this one. You have another reason. What is it, Father?"

"My son, Mildred is fashionable; and I am out of date and un——"

"You out of date, when you are abreast with every interest of importance in town!"

"Yes, and heartily disapprove of most of them."

"But come back to the subject. Why are you keeping us away from here?" The younger man moved from the opposite side of the library table and, drawing a chair closer, laid his hand affectionately on his father's knee. "Tell me; for whatever it is, I will overcome it." His voice was full of feeling. "I want to come home again; want to rear my children where I was reared and you were reared, and"—he brushed away a tear—"let me send for Mildred now, and let's settle it."

"But it is your dinner hour."

"Aren't you going to have something to eat in a little while?"

"Yes, but you understand I am unfashionable and insist on having only a modest supper."

"Modest supper! Old Aunt Ginny couldn't have a modest supper to save her life. It would take six of our dinners to make one of your modest suppers."

He called to an old negro passing in the hall, whose head was as white as his master's:

"Oh, Uncle Zeek, tell Aunt Ginny your Miss Mildred and I are going to take supper here to-night. Please also call over the 'phone and tell my wife to run over quick in the machine."

"I'll tell Ginny whut you says, suh," he answered with the distinguished air of the past, "but I'll hat'r git Jeems ter 'phome fer yer. I ain't nuv'r come down ter dat way er torkin' m'se'f."

"Another thing, Father"—he looked to Miss Polly for assistance—"for the next two years I must be away from home, must live somewhere among the pines; I——"

The strong practical-minded spinster broke in:

"I've told him all about it, Robert, and as soon as you can move over here we are all going with you into the Hills of Habersham. Jim Davis has already engaged old Ebenezer Mason's steers to haul your things up to the châlet." She laughed with effort. "You know there's not a horse in the county, and the roads are unfit for machines, so you will have to buy a rig."

Miss Polly choked down her emotion, and strove to divert the older man from the sudden change another generation was forcing upon him. She talked—talked about anything, everything.

"Now I have a splendid pair of heavy cobs I'll sell

cheap and throw in the rockaway. We must have something to take us around in that wonderful scenery and see those picturesque mountain people. The whole place is alive with interest and romance, and the old witch—I'm anxious to see her. They say she tells the most wonderful things." She referred to her letter. "Granny Tank is her name. Maybe she can tell us something about Minnie."

Colonel Warner blanched, but was silent. Miss Polly construed the silence into consent.

And so it was arranged that the Robert Noy Warners should take up residence at Warner Mansion, and according to stipulation it was to be kept open during their residence at the châlet, so that the Colonel could at all times seek its refuge.

In spite of himself conditions reconciled him. The old homestead and the châlet should glow with the light of another dawn. He would face about and follow; would change the requiem of the pines on old Wigwam into the song of health to his son.

CHAPTER IX

THE fresh mountain air was crisp and cool to Robert Noy Warner, and the sun felt warm as it filtered through the moving needles of the pine trees that protected his couch from the glare. The notes of birds and forest sounds, blending with children's voices and household industries, served to deepen the drowsiness into healing sleep.

"Billy, look; there's Bob." And little Araminta pointed to the shy head of a mountain boy peeping from behind a tree.

Billy begged: "Come on in the yard and play, Bob."

Bob's head shook a refusal as he pointed to the reclining figure of Robert Warner.

"That isn't anybody but Papa, and he's asleep," urged Billy, going towards the boy.

But the shy child of the mountains darted back into the forest, making a shield of a more distant tree. Billy and Araminta scaled the fence in pursuit.

"Please, Bob, come back; we'll play down at the spring, where no one will see you."

Being out of distance of "fokes," he permitted them to join him.

"Come on back, please; I've got lots of toys and things that Mamma only unpacked to-day."

But toys made no impression on the mind of the mountain boy. Poverty not only stunted and starved the men and women of the mountains, but begrudged even the children the time to play. Where the child hours of Billy's life were whiled away with pop-pistol and toy caps, Bob's childish years were spent with grim musket, in search of food and in protecting the still against "Revenues."

"Come on, Bob; you never have seen such grand toys."

"I'm feerd to go up thar," half yielding in his desire to discover the meaning of toys, without exposing ignorance. "I don't wanter go whar fokes is up thar." Here fear overcame him again. He put his tongue in the side of his cheek and produced a silver dime. He handed it to Billy. "Take hit ter yo' maw, an' git my granny ten cents' worth of that 'ar truck she cured Mr. Hannon's head with."

"You come on and ask her. Nobody's afraid of Mamma; come on, she will give it to you."

"I'll ask her," and Araminta scaled the fence, calling back, "but you've got to come and get it."

Bob timidly followed sideways behind Billy, allowing himself to be gently pulled along by the sleeve to the back porch.

"Mamma, Mamma!" began Araminta long before the house was reached; "Mamoo—ah, Mamma, run quick!"

"What on earth, Minta?" Mrs. Warner ran down the back steps, fearing the much dreaded rattlesnake

of that region had bitten one of them. "Quick, tell me what's the matter."

"Bob's here," quieted the child, turning and pointing behind her, "and his grandmother sent him to buy something; and he's afraid of grown people; and Billy and I like him—and——"

"Look here, Araminta." Mildred Warner sank on the steps. "You know how nervous and frightened I am up here in this out-of-the-way place. Who is Bob? Is this Bob?"

Her displeasure had caused a shyness to seize the boy again, and he struggled with Billy for his freedom. The little girl jumped up and down in unhappy nervousness and cried:

"Run, Mamma; Bob'll get away."

According to the submissiveness of the modern parent, Mrs. Warner hastened to the boys. She placed an arm around the lad.

"What is it, son? Your grandmother wants something? Is any one sick?"

"Hit's the misery got into Aunt Lys's cripple leg." He tried to ease away, but she held him. "She's 'bout to die, an' my granny sont me here"—again he removed the silver from his mouth—"fer ten cents' worth of that 'ar truck ye cured Mr. Hannon's head with."

"Stay with the children until I can speak to the trained nurse; don't run away now."

"I hain't!" was the now willing response.

When she returned later with Miss Lupton equipped for a medical mission, the boy was in a sea of amazed

joy. The children had piled toys all over the porch.

"Don't take Bob, Mamma. You and Miss Lupton can find the place." And so Bob remained, a whole long, joyous day, eating his dinner on the back porch, at first alone, but before the meal was finished Araminta and Billy had teased until their plates were removed, one on either side of his.

The Colonel frowned. Such democracy was against the grain of his rearing. The negroes grumbled about "waitin' on po' white trash," and even the indulgent mother had her doubts; but the children were gloriously happy. They had found a new playfellow, a boy that knew more things than anybody in the world.

At sunset Bob scuttled down the mountains, his bare feet fairly flying over rocks and briars in his effort to reach home before milking time. For no sooner was his back turned upon the intoxication of this new child life, than neglected chores at home stood accusingly before his conscience.

"Yonder he comes now." And Ebenezer's giant frame towering in the cabin door made not only that opening, but the entire cabin, look diminutive in comparison. He held a milking pail in one hand, and in the other a bucket of "slop feed." "Ye shorely hain't been up thar all day, air ye?"

Bob hung his head covered with wavy, black, unruly hair and tried to take the milking vessels from his grandfather.

"I bin er wantin' of ye pow'ful bad to-day." He

leaned over and whispered: "Wanted ye ter go up ter the still and git the rest of that juice."

"I plum fergot, Grandpap; seems like I fergot everything ter-day."

He looked into the old man's eyes fearlessly, and though Ebenezer saw little of his own face in the handsome, rough-hewed features, yet he recognized the stamp of youthful honesty.

"Has they axed ye about the still, er moonshine, er anything like that?"

Instantly bicycles, wagons, hobby-horses, mechanical toys beyond his power of description passed before him.

"Why, Grandpap, they hain't s'much as hearn tell er sich as that; they jist plays an' sich like."

"That mout all be true, but don't fergit to be keerful." He handed him the "bucket of slop" and walked on toward the cowshed. "'Caze Jim Blower said as how he seen Revenues 'round here yistiddy, an' I was afeerd to go up thar to the still to draw off the rest of that juice to bottle hit. I never wanted to be missed at the mill, ye see. Lord, I shore wush ye could er gone up thar an' drawd off that 'juice' yistiddy."

"Wharbouts must I hide the 'juice' ater I jugs hit ter-morrer?"

"Jim Blower said as how he'd tuk keer of hit tell the Revenues went off, if I could git hit hid in the bushes on t'other side of the mountain."

The boy was milking hard with both hands.

"Grandpap, I don't like Jim Blower fer nuthin'. I seed him talking mighty confidential-like to er 'fur-

riner' last week, an' Mister Hannon seed him, too; an' I heerd he got ten dollars for every still he squeeled on."

The old man threw an extra ear of corn to the cow, and dejectedly replied: "Bud told me about that, too."

"I jist feels like he told on Pappy, and if I finds out hit was him I'm gwine to kill him afore I'm growd."

The tragic fate of his father and mother meeting death in the still stood out in the minds of both.

"You was too leetle to reecollect, Bob; ye better not do nuthin' if ye finds out enything fer shore; jist tell me erbout hit." They started back to the house.

"No, Grandpap." He set the milk pail on the ground, and fastened an earnest eye on the old man's. "Hit's my right; I'm er thirteen year old come June, an' whut's more I kin tote my pappy's gun as good as he could, most as good, an' I'm gwine to kill whoever 'twas squeeled on Pappy."

"I reckon ye're right." They started on. "I had disremembered how old ye'd growd."

"But, Grandpap, I wush we never had to still no more liquor."

"Lord, boy, what air ye a-talking about?"

"Waal, I means—I wush we wus like them fokes up yander, and never had no still to hide."

"How ye reckin we'd live if we didn't still our corn? We kan't sell it, that is, nowhere abouts here. And if we tries to ship hit like I done year b'fore last the

profits is all took out of hit. Don't ye reecollect how nigh we come to starvin'?"

"Our corn was s'bad and onery, Grandpappy, was the reason hit never fetched no price."

"But we kan't raise no better'n that on these here poore, thin lands up here." He watched the boy as they walked on and sadly continued: "I'm feerd them rich fokes is puttin' notions in ye head—hain't they?"

"They hain't done nuthin'—I wus jist a'wishin' we never had to hide out from 'Revenues' no more."

"Eb! Bob! What's a'ailin' of ye?" And the gaunt figure of Ebenezer's blind wife appeared, feeling her way toward them. "'Pears to me hit ought to be dark ernuf to be a'turnin' in."

CHAPTER X

NO path led to or from the hut. It lay hidden on the side of the mountain under tall trees and undergrowth, like a melon on a vine choked with weeds and grass. No eye had ever penetrated the interior of its one room, save those of its occupants, the old conjure-woman and her man. Rude wooden shutters closed the windows, and the door opened only for the old man's passage in and out, since the witch made use of the rough stone chimney for entrance and exit.

Many averred to have seen her old cat, Raw-Head, calling from the cabin's top, while she rose through the smoke of the chimney, equipped with her basket, to take the toll she required from the countryside for protection against evil spirits and diseases.

She appeared at the homes of her clientele without warning; they rarely saw her come or go, though often the fruits of her visits were found secreted in stumps and hollow trees, awaiting removal. As her toll was heavy, it required many trips to store. The removal to her larder was only for the sake of convenience, since its security in the open was unchallenged. Not only man, but beast and creeping things, instinctively shunned old Granny Tank's truck.

"Tank! Ah, Tank!" screamed Granny Tank from

the top of the hut, where she was engaged in patching a leak in the tumbling room. "Git me that thar board I fotched from the injine track last week—and git me that 'ar piece of rag carpet Miss Mason give me, too; hop quick," she snarled.

"I reckin you never would hop none if you had this here old bent-up leg to be a'hoppin' on." He growled, though obeying her with alacrity.

"Git me them two shingles under the house, too." She snatched the plank from him and laid down on the roof's edge to reach the bit of rag he held at arm's length above him.

"Lord a'Mighty! ye ain't got the sense er fool was born with," loosening a former patch in her effort to hold on. "Put that 'ar carpet on er stick an' rech hit up here—ye hain't supposin' my arms is long as trees, air ye? Lord a'Mighty knows"—she fairly choked as her wrath bubbled out around her one tooth on the ugly gums—"I'll be glad whin ye gits back to the devil whar ye come from."

"Yes," he retorted between strangled coughs over a mouthful of tobacco juice that went the wrong way, "ye want to marry ag'in, I reckin."

"Sakes alive," she hissed; "if the devil ever does tuk ye back I bet I'll never git m'se'f twisted up with no more of his creeters—stop ye foolishness, and poke that 'ar carpet, will ye?"

Though still coughing, he dared not delay. "I jist wush ye'd fall off and break ye neck."

"Yes, and if I did ye'd starve right erlong inter the devil's claws, I reckin."

"Well, I don't see as how ye're a'doin' of s'much—ye jist tramp all over the country a'gassin' and blowin' with fokes—and a'stuffin' yeself full of vittals—and er bringin' me home the scraps. But I'm a'gwine to fix ye—I'm a'gwine to cut ye feet off of ye—then I reckin ye'll stay at home and tuk keer of me."

"Yes, and if ye devilment hadn't already crimped that old left leg er yourn, I'd have ye doin' er man's work around here, 'stid er layin' around here like a old low-down, scabby dog that ye air."

She had begun her descent from the roof, and was hanging in mid-air, struggling for a footing on the pile of boxes and a chair improvised as a ladder.

"Stiddy the cheer, will ye? Lord a'Mighty knows how come ye to be put here." Falling against him as she reached the ground, she hissed in his face: "For nobody else knows ceptin' the old devil hisself."

He threw himself under the ancient black gum tree that really sheltered the decaying roof and taunted:

"Ye're jist mad 'caze I found out fokes was a'livin' in the house yander. Ha! Ha! and you calling yo'self a witch."

"'Tain't no sich a thing!" and she sprang towards him with such venom that the expression of her long, crooked nostrils, furiously dilating, the short gray hair partly falling from the tucking comb, gave her face the impression of some ghoulish masquerade. "I knowd them fokes was a'comin' thar a'ten year ago."

"Why hain't ye never opened ye haid about hit, then?" He grinned hideously.

"'Caze I was a'feered ye was sich a coward ye'd

be a'wantin' to git away from here." With this thrust she lighted her pipe and sat on the doorstep contentedly puffing.

"I hain't a'feered of nobody," fear trembling in every word. "I jist thought we'd better git out a'here b'fe the fokes what owns hit driv us out."

"Humph!" angrily. "I'd jist like to see anybody drive me out of this cabin! I bin a'livin' here a twenty year, and I'll be bound if I don't live out m' natral days right here." And she squared herself in the doorway as though real violence were imminent.

"Waal, I hain't one to raise no p'int with fokes about ther own property."

"Raise no p'int!" She burst in with mocking laughter. "You won't even deespute the p'int of your nose with a fly! A slinking all around here away from fokes like a yaller houn' a'feered to look a rabbit in the face."

His head fell like the hound to which she compared him. She mercilessly continued:

"Ye old no account coward, ye! Them fokes name is Warner—they hain't got nuthin' to do with the Noyers—and if they did that young fool Robert's bin dead s'long ago they've done forgot he ever lived, much less the fool that kilt him."

As she voiced this acknowledgment the cripple crouched closer to the ground mutely appealing with his hands for mercy.

"Thar hain't a soul here what knows ye." She comforted in real earnest now. "I'm a'gwine to nose

around 'mongst the fokes to-day, and if thar's a bit of danger I'll move to-night."

Reaching back into the room, she drew forth her old sunbonnet, which she tied on, and further comforted: "Ye know I wouldn't let nobody git ye—I'd burn 'em all up in ther beds first." Reaching again, she brought her basket, which she placed over her arm. This with her stick completed her tramping outfit. She paused as she passed the conscience-cowed body, and in rough tenderness poked him with her stick. "I'll fix hit all right; don't ye be a'feered—g'long back thar in the house and go to sleep tell I gits back."

Humble like a conquered beast, he crawled into the darkened room to await the return of his protector.

Granny Tank did not come down the mountain with her usual precaution of snakes. Her lips moved in audible expression of the thoughts crowding upon her.

What if the opening of Robert Noy's house should also open the murder of that ill-fated youth? What if Jerry Watkins should be traced to the hut in North Carolina, where she had stumbled upon him bleeding and apparently dying, and where in gratitude—she always knew it was gratitude for her patient nursing—he had made her his wife. What if people there should tell of her selling out, for in a small way they had prospered, Jerry doing all sorts of odd jobs during the dark confusion of reconstruction days. Easy, happy times were they until the uncontrollable desire seized Jerry to return to the Hills of Habersham.

She had begged against it, fought and quarreled

about it, and finally, after the death of their little boy, had yielded. But the move brought no happiness; the spell of prosperity was broken. Not a moment of contentment had been theirs; on the contrary, each breath of Jerry's life was fraught with the fear of discovery, until with cowardice nurtured in guilt he not only shunned mankind, but mankind's greatest blessing, sunlight. He had ceased to be a man, and she, alas, had become a witch! Else how to explain their hermit life or how to maintain a living? Ah, if youth and happiness could ever predict for itself the old age of a witch! Suppose Jerry Watkins should be traced to Tank? Surely the law would scorn to accept so degraded a bit of afflicted humanity in payment for the life of a man. Her soured old heart puckered its crusty valves at the thought of the miserable years of his cowardly life ending in a misshapen mass swinging in the mid-air.

"Howdy, Granny," came tremulously from the railroad track, the only promenade of the county.

The old creature started, indignant that she should have been surprised and fearing lest her lips had betrayed her. She did not realize that her walk of a mile was ended—was unconscious of slipping and jumping down the red clay embankment to the railroad track, almost falling on a little girl and boy journeying storeward. But she was fully aware that the snarling grin with which she returned the salutation of the child had blanched both their faces and produced forgetfulness of anything they might have seen or heard."

"Gittin' up to the store fast as ever ye kin. Gwine after news, I reckin?" with a scowl.

"No'm, I jist a'gwine after Maw's snuff," responded the frightened girl, while the boy slipped behind his sister and dug his head in her back.

"Git from b'hind thar, Jess; I hain't a'gwine to pester na'r one of ye to-day; that is, if I finds a nice mess of taters in my old sweet gum tree 'g'inst Saturday."

Satisfied with her first toll, she measured a step with her stick preparatory to accompanying the children down the track, and incidentally learning the news. But no sooner was her back turned than their shaky little legs fled in the opposite direction.

"Come back here, Gin, you and Jess. That ain't no way to git to the store. Jist walk 'longside of me tell I tells ye to go; will ye?"

Panting from the run and almost frantic from fear, they resumed their places beside the hag.

"I reckin as how ye're gwine to the store to tell a pack of lies about whut ye knows about them Warners up thar?" Her tone compelled a clean breast of any news they bore.

"Waal," began the girl half crying, "I hain't said I knowd no more'n that thar was a boy, and a gal, and a ole man, and a 'ooman, and the 'ooman's man, and a passel of niggers, and four horses, and—that's all I ever said I knowd."

Granny pushed her sunbonnet back and glared into their blanched faces.

"Do ye reckin I'm a'gwine to be standin' here

wastin' my time a'lissnin' to things I've tole ye a'ten year ago? G'long and git them taters; ye hear?"

Her last words had no audience. The children fled like rabbits.

"So thar's five of 'em up thar," she mused, stepping the ties of the track in her peculiar gait. "I wonder wharbouts they come from, and if they knowd them Noyers—I wonder——" But there she was in sight of Belinda Kite's house. She must watch her chance to arrive unseen. When Belinda's back was turned to go down another row of cabbages, she would slip to the corner of the ramshackle fence, and wait motionless until discovered.

"Lord a'Mighty, Granny!" exclaimed Belinda, as she reached that portion of the fence where the conjure-woman rested. "Won't ye come in and rest ye bonnet?"

"Thar's jist as much rest out here as ther' is in a cabbage patch."

"I was a'gwine to tuk ye up to the house," pointing to a hut in the distance. "I thought as how ye might do a leetle doctorin' on Sonny. He's a'gittin' s' tallery lookin' and sleepin' all the time, and when he do wake he jist stares at ye like he hain't never seed ye b'fore."

"B'lindy, give ye boy ernuf vittals to eat, and hit'll keepin' him from a'eatin' of s'much dirt."

"Law, Granny! How'd ye know he eet dirt?" Belinda pushed the sunbonnet back from her brow, and regarded the hag in wonderment, listening attentively for the remainder of the prescription.

The witch shut her eyes and chanted weirdly:

"Put him thu a bar'el hoop three times!
Then drive the bar'el hoop back onto the bar'el tell hit cracks.
Be shore hit don't do no more'n crack.
If hit breaks,—the child'll die."

She drew a dirty little bag out of her pocket, in which were placed a number of enchantments.

"Pin this here conjure-bag over ye heart, and ever' mornin' a'ter ye gives him a bait of vittals say three times, 'Lord, thou kin'st make me clean; Lord, thou kin'st make me clean; Lord, thou kin'st make me clean.' "

"Lord, Granny, how did ye come to know s'much?"

"I hain't got no notion of tellin' ye all I knows, B'lindy, and, whut's more, I hain't got no time to be a'foolin' here with ye, when old fokes, and sick fokes, and chilluns, and niggers is a'movin' in here—a'shakin' ther hosses' tails in our faces."

"Hain't hit so?" exclaimed the woman, snagging her dress on one of the loose wires of the fence in effort to get on more confidential relations. "Can't we run them niggers out, like we done all the rest that tried to come settling 'round here?"

The old woman shook her head and mumbled:

"What'd I tell ye a'ten year ago about them black creepers, a'creepin' through a hole too high for us to re'ch?"

"Lord a'Mighty! I reecollect ye did." And she honestly thought she did.

"Hit takes a long pole, and a strong pole to hit them rich fokes. Jist look at this here railroad they put here, a'skeerin' fokes and ther critters so they kan't plow ther crops."

"Ye're talkin' gospel now." Belinda nervously removed her bonnet and rebound her greasy hair into a corkscrew knot on the back of her head.

"I hain't never got use to that ingine yit; I reecollect the fust time it come a boo-hooin', and a berhuzzin' along here, me and the old man wus a'workin' out here monstrous peaceable-like, when the smoke come a'kirlin' out'n the cut yander, and the ingine come a'blowin' and a'bellerin'; we reely thought Hell had busted loose! We did that—I tell ye we did! And Pap said when he fust heerd the whistle, he thought the man had the most tarnation lungs he ever heerd tell on. Oh, I tell ye, hit's done spilt the country."

Granny Tank took in every word, though she appeared absorbed in chanting conjure.

"Thar's old Ebenezer Miles"—Belinda worked herself into a fury, forgetful of the personnel of her auditor—"a'haulin' ther truck. Why, his steers is bin a'gwine up and down Wigwam fur a week or more, fetchin' sich truck as nobody hain't never seed in ther life. And Miss Mason says Ebenezer's nigh 'bouts out'n his senses over the 'ooman they calls Miss Warner. And Bud Hannon's jist as bad; he let a trunk fall 'ginst his head, and the 'ooman put some truck on hit that kyored him, 'fo' he knowd he wus hurt. Miss Mason says——"

"Put a mess of cabbages in the chestnut holler, B'lindy—'ginst dark."

Belinda's excitement fell with a thud. She realized the intimate relationship she had unconsciously assumed, and with groveling apologies placed the witch back in her superior realm.

"Lord, Granny," she began all over again, "ye know——"

"G'long back to weedin' yer cabbages, B'lindy, and if eny of 'em grows as big as ye mouth, hit oughter last ye family a year."

So saying, she resumed her mumbling, and Belinda, entirely awed, went back to the plants, not daring to turn her head. Being assured of this, Granny stealthily crawled to the low ditch beside the railroad track, without the turning of a pebble in her path. On she crawled, constantly measuring the distance back, until she was beyond the eye of Belinda. Hardly had she resumed her halting walk up the track, when the house of Ebenezer Mason, the only one in the county that boasted a glass window, came in view. Quickly she withdrew to the woods, making her way from tree to tree, until she stood where she could both see and hear the two old women in the yard.

Mrs. Mason or Aunt Hame, as she was called, was stone-blind. Her tall, gaunt body moved slowly and unsteadily as the long arms waved about in effort to feel her way. The tall cripple sister, leaning against the house helpless to reach her fallen crutch, indicated the direction to the blind woman by continuous words:

"Here I be, Hame."

"I'll git thar terrectly, Lys; keep on a'sayin' somethin' so I kin tell whar'bouts ye be." And the long arms waved longer than ever, while rolling stones threatened to trip her at every step.

"This a way, Hame; ye're a'gwine too far to'ards the pig sty; keep straight in front of ye." The pain-seared face of the old maid told not only of life's multiplied disappointments, but physical torture as well.

"Try to make out tell I finds ye." And the sightless eyes stretched with wild effort for guidance.

Granny could hardly restrain the human impulse to help, but loyalty to the cowed creature she had left in her cabin hardened her. She reasoned: "Lys is lookin' straight over here, and if she sights me a'comin' over thar like fokes ginally comes, she'll talk more'n ever 'ginst me bein' a witch. And then fokes would start to coming to my house, and ketch the old man shore." She shivered at the thought, and consistent to her life of the last forty years, crushed pity from her heart. "I jist hain't a'gwine to do hit. Hit's better for Lys to fall and git kilt than fur Tank to swing."

At that moment exhausted with the strain, Miss Lys's good leg gave way, and she fell at the blind woman's feet just as her hand reached out to succor. She gave an agonizing cry as the crippled hip struck the ground.

"Oh, Lord a'Mighty help me," cried the sightless woman, holding the sufferer's head against her breast, and realizing that only Omniscience could respond to

a call so far from human ears. "Oh, Lord, hope me to git Lys in the house."

With every movement the cripple begged for death, until, powerless and hopeless, Aunt Hame sank to the ground beside her. She placed the head in her lap and stroked the plastered hair with toil-hardened hands.

"Kan't ye sorter let me pull ye up a leetle bit at er time, Lys?"

"I kan't move a lick," came the response broken with groans.

Granny Tank embraced the opportunity.

"Now, I reckin as how Lys'll give me a witches' credit this time." She crept with cat-like silence, until she was just above them; then, making signs in the air with her hands, as though casting spells, she fastened her eyes upon the streaming ones of the cripple, and began to chant:

"Lys she fell,
But I kin tell
Lys is well."

She continued chanting and sign-making above them, with growing confidence as she saw the deepening impression on the faces:

"Lys she fell,
But I kin tell
Lys is well."

Keeping her eyes riveted on the old maid's, which now brightened with hope:

"Lys she fell,
But I kin tell
Lys is well."

With this she placed her arms beneath those of Lys and with the assistance of Aunt Hame raised her quickly from the ground, pushed her crutches in place without giving time for protest or groan, and proceeded to guide her in the house. While the cripple woman was influenced by the hopeful security of the chant, it grew into the earnestness of prayer. Aunt Hame subconsciously joined in the singing, which inspired Miss Lys to pronounce a word here and there as she hobbled between the blind woman and the witch.

They laid her on one of the beds on the darkened end of the room.

"Oh, my Lord!" groaned Miss Lys, "lift m'leg a leetle, Granny; Lord a'Mighty! Ouch!" And the poor creature swooned from pain.

The hour for a master stroke arrived, and Granny Tank met it. She announced to the blind woman that her sister had passed away. Aunt Hame fell to her knees at the bedside.

"Git up thar, Hame. I'm a'gwine to fetch her life back. Here, take these herbs and light 'em on the hearth; soon as they gits to smokin' good, you keep a'sayin':

"'Lord, our love is sot on Thee;
Lord have mercy!'

"Keep a'sayin' hit tell them yerbs stops a'smokin.'"

Rushing to the lean-to shed room used for a kitchen and eating room, Granny Tank snatched up a glass

of water and a spoon. She hastily forced some of the "moonshine" whiskey, which she always carried "'ginst snake bite," between the patient's teeth. Miss Lys was already reviving, and Granny had to work rapidly. She sprinkled some odorized herb on the pain-tortured face while humming indistinguishable hoo-doo incantations.

Miss Lys opened her eyes.

"Granny, ye've saved me."

The blind woman, feeling no more smoke from the incense, raised her voice at the sound of her sister's. She sobbed a prayer of gratitude for God's mercies and the blessing of Granny Tank in times of trouble.

Granny administered another dose of "Yerb Mixtry," which was heavily diluted with moonshine, and was shortly rewarded by feeble tones of Miss Lys saying she felt "a sight pearter."

Leaving the invalid to "dose off the yerbs," Aunt Hame and Granny Tank instinctively drew chairs closer to the fireless hearth for a "dip of snuff."

Comfortably leaning her elbows on her knees, and rubbing the snuff brush up and down on the front of her single tooth, the witch began:

"I reckin Lys oughter have some of my salve weed 'intment to rub her hip with."

"Yes, I reckin," expectorating in the ashes, "hit would do her a power of good."

"I'll put some of hit in the spring holler 'g'inst tomorrer night, and Bob kin come and fetch hit fer ye, and ye kin send me a bait of that 'ar side meat ye kyored s'good last Christmus."

"Thar hain't nobody to send for one nur t'uther. Ebenezer's s'busy haulin' truck for them fine fokes, and Bob's sot plum crazy, too."

"Well, ye kin jist gimme the meat now, and I'll git the 'intment to the spring holler for ye." So saying, she followed the woman to the kitchen shed adjoining. "Stick ye knife in here, Hame," doubling the portion, "'caze times air changing," she incanted; "fokes air changin'! the Warnerses—the Warnerses!"

"Ye're right, Granny—all of 'em's changin'. But Eb says them Warner fokes up thar is the best fokes he ever seen; why, he's made more money a'haulin' ther truck than he ever made in six mont's at the store and the mill together. T'other day Lys was took down powerful bad, and Miss Warner fotched a 'ooman here that done her a sight of good. But nobody don't like the looks of the old Gran'dady up thar fer nuthin'; he jist roams ever'whar, with a old white-headed nigger that pears to be er hundred year old. Eb says he gits a smothery feelin' whensomer he comes 'crost the old man and the nigger."

Granny was grateful that Aunt Hame's eyes were sightless during the description of Colonel Warner.

What if, after all, he was a Gov'ment man in search of Jerry? Should she hasten home, warn Jerry and flee? or would it be possible to intimidate the country people against giving information about Witches Head? She believed she could—at any rate she would not communicate her fears to Jerry until further cause for alarm.

"Here, Granny, whar'bouts air ye?" Aunt Hame was poking in the air with the meat.

"I was jist a'list'nin' to Raw Head and the speerits."

"Lord, I hope ye hain't fetched ye cat with ye."

"She don't never come off'n Witches Head. Ye know that, Hame." She went to the door and expectorated, setting the brush in the corner of her mouth. "Bein' a mile apart don't hinder me and her from talkin', 'specially durin' the time of speerits walkin'."

"Lord, Lord!"

"Sh—Raw Head's sayin':

"'Who's a'gwine to grind ye corn
When ye man's in jail, and Bob is gone?'"

"Lord, Granny, don't cast sich a spell on a poor critter that can't see out of na'r one of her eyes—take the conjure off, please."

The only way to git hit off is to keep ye mouth shet—and all the rest of fokses' mouth out'n my business." She pointed towards the châlet, but remembering the blindness of her auditor, added: "The first mess of talk I hears about me up thar at the Warnerses Raw Head'll drap conjure s'thick 'round here tell hit'll make

"Open graves, and shet graves!
Dead a'livin', and livin' dead!"

"God a'Mighty, Granny!"

But Granny was gone.

CHAPTER XI

FOR the Lord's sake, Hame, tuk Granny Tank's 'intment off. Hit's near 'bout burnt a hole plum through m'hip," and Miss Lys's face spoke the agony of her body.

Mrs. Mason felt her way to the dark portion of the room where the beds were situated, and with dexterity turned and readjusted the sufferer to a degree of comfort. She forebore to burden Miss Lys with her anxiety regarding the appearance of Revenues in the vicinity and of Bob's intended visit to the still that day.

"The juice had to be drawd off, and I reckin hit's safer fer Bob to be ketched up thar than for Eb. Eb says nobody's a'gwine to the still s'long as he stays at the store. Mebbe they won't, but I feel s'downhearted about somethin' I—Lord, I wush that boy'd come on."

She turned to the cooking shed to prepare the midday meal.

"I wonder if Bob or Eb is thought to move that 'ar worm to the old still they tucked under them bushes by the pig-pen branch? Lys said she seen hit plain as day the last time she was down thar. I jist wush I could see!" She paused to wipe the perspiration

from her face with the corner of her long, coarse apron.

"I'm a'gwine down thar and move hit this minute, but then," she hesitated, "if I taken hit from thar, I hain't got no sight to hide hit in no better place. Lord a'Mighty! hit's jist awful to be blind."

She scooped the meal from the sack into the bread-pan.

"I dunno what to do—I wush that child was here."

The preparation of cabbage, sidemeat and corn pone continued. The aroma from the cabbage told the time of the day to the wayfarer along the railroad track. Many faces pinched with hunger turned towards the lowly abode for a whiff of the cooking cabbage.

"I wush to the Lord thar was some way to keep from starvin' without runnin' a still, and yit"—she stopped and fumbled for her snuff box—"when Eb tried to sell his corn he never got enough to feed us through the winter. Whar'bouts is that 'ar snuff box?" still feeling on the table. "Oh, I reecollect now; hit's out in the yard on the stump. Waal, I jist got to git hit; thar hain't nuthin' to hope bear trouble like a dip of snuff."

She passed through the big room of the house where Miss Lys faintly groaned.

She felt above her head to a string of red peppers suspended from a rafter. "I reckin if I make ye some pepper tea along with a drap of that juice under the house and put a hot rock nigh 'bouts yer hip, hit mout make ye feel pearter."

"No, no," groaned the poor creature; "nuthin' hain't gwine to do me no good, but jist ceptin' to die."

Aunt Hame moved her hand from the peppers to feel her way to the door. The click of the wooden latch in the gate halted her.

"Who air ye?" she queried, as steps approached the little porch built level with the ground.

"Does Ebenezer Mason live here?" questioned a strange voice that almost stopped the beating of her heart.

"The Revenues! I bet hit's a Revenue!" She steadied herself against the door jamb, and quietly replied:

"Yes, this is wharbouts he lives."

"I am a United States Revenue officer"—he beckoned to three others outside the fence—"and these are my assistants. We found an old worm belonging to a still in your yard, and we've come to search for whiskey."

"S'arch ahead." She felt for a chair to support her wobbly knees.

"Lord a'Mighty!" she thought. "If they finds that five-gallon jug under the house, and the old worm in the yard, hit'll jist about fetch Eb to prison. Oh, Lord, I wonder if they have ketched Bob, too?" Though her soul bent and twisted like a tree in a storm, she sat rigid and upright awaiting their verdict.

The officers came shortly through the kitchen, the easily found jug in the hands of the leader.

"Here it is. So you see we will have to wait here for Mason. Can you give us some dinner? The pay from it will help some, won't it?"

"Yes, I'll fetch ye dinner." She started to spread the table.

"Oh, never mind setting a table; this cabbage and corn bread smell good enough for hungry men to eat right off the fire."

Accordingly they took plates from the shelf, and served themselves from the cooking vessels.

Aunt Hame stood by the chair from which she had risen. The step of Ebenezer on the railroad track prevented her from hearing Miss Lys's plaintive wail:

"For God's sake, turn me a leetle."

Ebenezer's gentle voice alone pierced her consciousness.

"Gittin' on tolerable, Lys?"

He entered. The revenue men seized their guns. The odor of whiskey on the floor and ground, the copper worm before them, told the story to the mountaineer. Resignation spread over his face. He looked towards the tall figure of his wife to the suffering cripple on the bed, and despair made his reply almost gentle to the men:

"Put ye guns up, fokes. Ye're got me."

Instantly the weapons were lowered. Ebenezer Mason's word was as good as another's bond. The men resumed their meal while they talked over arrangements for making the train to Atlanta.

The prisoner moved towards his wife, and whispered:

"Is Bob come?"

Her fixed expression spoke the sickening negative. He went to the kitchen door.

"Ye couldn't put off goin' tell to-morrer, could ye? I'd like pow'ful to make some 'rangements a'fore I went."

"No," responded the leader, putting his plate on the table, and emptying the remaining contents of the jug out of the kitchen door. "We've got to make the next train back to Atlanta. It goes in about a half hour. We got to be moving to the stopping-place now."

Without another word, Ebenezer took his coat from the peg. "Good-by, Hame; hit'll come out all right somehow," and he started to the door.

"Hain't ye gwine to eat no vittals, Eb?"

"Hain't hongry," and his broad shoulders squared as though to carry the big load.

How long she stood there, or how long Miss Lys had been hanging half out of bed, none knew.

Towards sundown several straggled in to offer assistance and gather news. Jim Blower milked the cow, and took half the milk. His conscience did not reproach him that he had betrayed Ebenezer to the officers. His own still was in jeopardy. The reward of his secret evidence protected him from their vigilance. He took the milk because his children were little and they were hungry. They had to have milk, and he had to have liquor. Aunt Hame was in too much trouble to miss or need it.

CHAPTER XII

THOUGH the sun shone hot and clear, heat and light penetrated but dimly through the forest where Bob, pulling the rude canoe behind him, proceeded to hide it in the bushes near the creek's edge. He lay perfectly still beside the boat until assured he was alone. Then he darted through the pathless wood, making a light, dragging mark every now and then on the ground with his heel to show the trail to his grandfather, "in case somethin' went amiss."

On he wound up the mountain side over jutting rocks and fallen timbers, half covered with treacherous vines which concealed ugly gulches and dangerous reptiles. Bounding from one insecure foothold to another, the boy came at length to his steepest and last climb, some twenty feet, where trickling water from a hidden spring made moss and wood soil slimy and slippery.

Bob paused and listened. An ugly hiss and rattle warned him to jump for the weapon of a big rock as the reptile made a spring in his direction. With an alertness born of danger he dodged his enemy and fastened the rock upon its head full ten feet away.

Diverted from his mission and heedless of its dangers, Bob ran to the snake to procure the trophy of ten rattles and a button as a gift for Billy. As he was

rinsing the rattles in a stream oozing through the crevices of growth on the rock, he heard the breaking of twigs, as though from an approaching footstep. He listened—stood full five minutes to be sure. Then with dexterity he scaled the twenty feet, and landed at its top in a cave. This excavation of nature was entirely hidden by the foliage of trees which, wind-turned in their infancy by the scant hold of root, had grown to maturity at all sorts of angles. They swung their boughs with protecting arms over the cave's mouth, a spot to invite the hard-put moonshiner to bring his unmarketable corn behind their friendly curtain, and take it forth in juice, profitable for the maintenance of his ever-increasing and hungry family.

Bob looked about the cave to see that no one had entered it since he and his grandfather had left the beer to distill. He examined and restored the gun by the hopper, and once more washed the rattles in the clear water of a spring which was roughly piped and ran into a barrel on the far edge of the cave.

"Them's nice rattlers, shore. I reckin as how Billy hain't never kilt no bigger.

He dropped them in his pocket and began the work of "draining off" one lot, and bottling the "juice." He had almost filled the last of the jugs, when a heavy body swung in behind him and a voice which seemed to run down the barrel of a gun called:

"I've got a bead on you."

At first Bob blanched to the lips; then a desperate smile broke over his fine, boyish face, made older by years of continual responsibility.

"Ye've got me shore," he laughed nervously, "and bein' as ye have, I reckin as how hit 'tain't a'gwine to hurt ye to take a taste of the juice, for I tell ye, hit's pure, honest juice that ye could feed to a baby."

With condescension the "Revenue" held the gourd under the gurgling jug. The tempting fumes quickly differentiated between official duties and individual liberty.

"Jist say if ye ever tasted eny finer'n that?" said the boy, whose fear had given place to the alertness of the desperate. As the liquid noisily went down the throat of the man, Bob seized his grandfather's gun in the corner, and leveled it squarely upon the officer. "Reckin I've got ye now." And the boy's face was a study of boyish beauty as he coolly bade the man drop his arms and back "up'ards and out."

No sooner had the "Revenue" climbed out of sight than the boy was sliding and rolling down the rocks, over the rough way of the forest, back to the canoe. Launching it, he hugged the shore, fearing to cross the creek until he was a full mile upstream from his grandfather's hut. When landing and tying the boat, he fled onward and away up Wigwam, anywhere to prevent his incriminating presence menacing the "fokes."

"Grandpap" must not be imperiled at any cost, else how would the blind granny get along? Who would lift Aunt Lys so painlessly, too? The "Revenue" might suspect, but there was no evidence to fasten the ownership of the "still" if he kept out of the way.

He stumbled to the ground and lay there, striving

to evolve some scheme of warning. A crackling sound disturbed him, he must fly again, but where?

"What air ye a'doin' here, I'd like to know? A'layin' 'round tryin' to spy into fokses' business, I reckin. And Granny Tank's face bent over him. But the fears of Granny were obliterated in the happiness of finding safe communion with a human being. Her vicious expression and snapping threats were welcome to his whirling brain.

"Oh, Granny, tell me what to do!" And with quivering lips, he recounted the perils of the morning.

Granny Tank uttered a boisterous, cruel laugh, ending in repeated calls to her cat:

"Raw-Head, ah, Raw-Head!"

The cat appeared with alternate spittings and growls, while the ruffled fur on her humped-up back gave appearance of feline deformity.

"He's kotched, Raw-Head. Ebenezer's kotched!"

"No, no," corrected the boy, "not unless they find him with me."

"He's kotched, Raw-Head; we knowd hit ten year ago."

"Not if I keep away," he insisted; "please, Granny, let me stay here a spell with ye; I'll tote ye water, and split ye wood, and do whatever ye tells me to."

"Ye little fool," she hissed, "tryin' to git ye nose inside my house, air ye?"

"No, Granny, jist let me sleep a'settin' here on the steps," he pleaded.

"G'long thar; ye kin sleep under that old black

gum tree, if ye're a mind to, and that's all the nigher ye're a'gwine to come."

"Thank ye, Granny." And the boy's face shone with the relief her protection afforded him. "The Revenues'll be a'feerd to come a'nigh of ye, a'huntin' of enybody, won't they? Gimme ye ax, and I'll split ye some kindlin' now."

A spark of pity illuminated for a moment the old hag's heart as she handed him the ax, but it was only for a moment. Death had robbed her of her boy. Bah! she would make good use of this one's misery, and lay up wood for the winter. It promised to be cold, too. Raw-Head had corroborated this.

Accordingly, until sundown, Bob "toted" and stacked the wood. Though often faint from hunger, he scorned to ask food where none was offered.

"Waal, Granny, hit be about stoppin' time, I reckin." And the boy threw his hungry body under the black gum tree.

"Yes, and bedtime, too," she grinned, "'caze thar hain't no vittals here fer ye."

"All right, Granny." He turned as though to sleep, but in reality to hide the tears that came from hunger, from fear for loved ones, from disappointment at being cut off from his new companions. But God tempered the wind, and ere Granny Tank's vicious rattling of dishes had died away wonderful dreams wafted him to Billy's house, where plates of all sorts of good things surrounded him on the back porch table, and Billy's mamma kissed him, actually pressed his head against her bosom like she did Billy's, and

the stern-faced old Colonel was going to kill all the "Revenues" so that nothing would ever hurt his folks again. How the rattlesnakes began crawling in the yard, they coiled and uncoiled and made such a din of their shaking rattles that his head swam, and he would have fallen in among the squirming mass, but that Granny Tank gathered them all up by their tails and snapped their heads off. Then all was serene again, and the back porch table still invited him. He could eat, eat, forever.

Granny Tank did not rouse the boy at sun-up, but placed instead her numerous water vessels in sight, so that when he waked from his merciful oblivion he would see his duty and do it. She also placed a pone of corn bread across the top of one of the tomato cans, now serving as a water vessel; but her heart changed ere she reached the door, and returning she broke it in half, laying a piece on the ground beside the can. It is possible this, too, would have been subdivided, had not the boy's eyes opened and fastened on it hungrily and gratefully.

"Thank ye, Granny; I'll run and fetch ye water while I chaws on hit."

Her heart opened again and she dropped the other half, but the boy did not perceive it, and she picked it up and put it in her pocket. She was much concerned about permitting lawful prying about her premises. The boy did not fear her, nay, he seemed to like her. A frosty warmth like smoke rising from ice rose around her heart, and she smiled with an almost human expression. She would let him hang

around, not too close lest Tank might be able to crawl out when the sun was real hot. His last attack held him almost motionless in bed, save when the fits seized him. She wished she could get some "doctor medicine," but even the suggestion of such threw him into "a spell."

She stopped and peeped through one of the cracks of the cabin, from which the winter stuffing of old rags had been removed, and watched Bob trudge up and down until all the cans were filled.

The first generous feeling in twenty years took possession of her. She took the other half of the corn pone, and waited on the doorstep until he emerged from under the hut.

"Here!" She poked the bread to him.

"Thank ye, Granny; I'll save hit for m'dinner, and I thought," in a tone seeking advice, "I'd see if I could git me a leetle work up yander," pointing towards the châlet whose chimneys were visible through the trees, " 'caze I done thought hit out, and I knows no 'Revenue' hain't a'gwine a'huntin' up thar."

Relieved to be rid of him for the day, she admonished him to "fetch her a good pail of vittals for a'eatin' her out of house and home."

Bob dug his toe in the ground during this tirade, then regretfully drew from his shirt the half pone of corn bread, remarking as he handed it to her:

"I reckin they'll give me a bite up thar."

She snatched the bread. "Clear out."

This he did with swiftness, nor stopped until he reached the side yard of the châlet. There he brought

himself up with a jerk, for on the inside on a rug under the cool shade of a tree sat Billy, Araminta, and a strange little girl, listening in wrapt attention to the funniest sort of hoop-skirted lady, who was sitting upright in a chair before them reading the most wonderful book about boys, and caves, and robbers, and all sorts of things that made him forget the "Revenues," or being hungry, or anything except Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. So breathlessly absorbed in their marvelous exploits was he, that when the book closed in the most thrilling part, he audibly added his "Please read more" to the other children's: "Oh, Cousin Polly, don't stop; please read to the end of the chapter."

But Cousin Polly never altered a decision. The Medes and Persians were a race of weaklings in comparison with her austerity in literary work.

"No more to-day," and the book was closed to emphasize the decision. "To-morrow, at the same hour, after lessons!" And she moved towards the house with mortification at the thought of having to drag them into the realm of intellectual industry by the humble means of Tom Sawyer. She heeded not the little voices.

"Please, Cousin Polly."

Bob sprang astride the fence.

"I'll give ye these here rattlers," shaking them aloft to attract her.

"Where did you get them?" And Billy was beside him on the fence pushing Araminta and Julie de Layne away until he had investigated their "poisonous quali-

ties." "Keep your hands off; they might kill a girl."

The girls stood below in wonder as the mountain boy quietly narrated how he "Kilt him with a rock on t'other side of the mountain."

Immediately Bob measured to the stature of Tom Sawyer, and Billy suggested the instant formation of a gang. Bob knew the exact cave to suit them. Jim Dike and a lot of boys would join, and, without loss of time or superfluous modesty, he suggested himself for the honorable place of captain.

CHAPTER XIII

BUT you can't read and write well enough to be captain over me."

"But you hain't never toted no gun."

"But you oughtn't to be captain over me, Bob," Billy blurted, "because—because you can't read and write as well as I, and, well, you have never even read Tom Sawyer before."

He had not.

"But you hain't never toted no gun ertall, ye see, and the boys hain't a'gwine to foller no captain that hain't ever killed s'much as a snake."

"I'll tell you," answered Billy, staggering under the weight of truth; "you teach me to shoot, and I'll teach you all I know about reading and writing, and then we'll take it turn about being captain."

Bob was not eager, as he feared to lower his position by exposing his ignorance in "book l'arnin'." Billy argued well, however, and would have prevailed had not Julie with a tilt to her nose interfered.

"Well, leave him out, Billy; you can be captain all of the time."

"Yes," sneered Bob, discomforted, but attracted by Julie's piquant little face, "and he won't have no follerin' but two gals."

Araminta climbed a plank or two of the fence, and in the innocency of childish friendship begged:

"Oh, Bob, don't call me a gal, because I like you so much."

"Well, I'll jist call her a gal." He was fascinated by Julie's antagonism.

"I don't care what you call me," and Julie's thin lips pursed into a saucy pout. "I'm twelve years old and almost a lady, and when I get to be four years older my grandmother is going to give me my mother's jewels, and I'm going to be a sure-enough lady; and, what's more, I'm going to France with my brother Craigmore; he is to be a Marquis and do as he pleases."

Bob failed to gather her meaning, but he determined to subdue her. He knew Billy's enthusiasm was ready for any sacrifice.

"Waal, we mout jist as well drap the gang business, if s'much jawin's got to go on, let 'lone from a gal."

"I've got jist as much right to talk as a man, much less a little old country boy that never heard of his great, great grandfather. That's the reason we are going away from America."

Bob's nostrils dilated with resentment.

"I'll bet thar hain't a man in these parts that hain't heerd tell about mine, and, what's more, thar never was but one around here that ever handed out his jaw to the Gray Eagle of Habersham. Why, he'd kill a man quicker'n he would a b'ar if he fooled 'long him."

"Why didn't he kill the one that handed out 'his jaw,' then?" taunted Julie.

"'Caze he knowd that un was right; he never hurt nobody that was right."

Billy mounted the fence and put his arm about the descendant of the Gray Eagle.

"Tell us about him, Bob. Maybe we'll call you the 'Gray Eagle.'"

"I never heerd Grandpap norate no more'n that. But I'm gwine to be captain or I hain't gwine to be in the gang."

"Well, take your old self off, sir, for Billy is——"

"Hush, Julie, you haven't anything to do with this. All right, Bob; you can be captain until I learn to shoot, and if you beat me reading before I beat you shooting, you can still be captain, and we'll call you the 'Gray Eagle'!"

"That's fine." Araminta danced over to Julie. "What are you going to be?"

"She not a'gwine to be nuthin' if I'm captain."

"'Sh, Bob"—she climbed to his ear and whispered —"she's our company, and she's got to be something, because she hasn't any mamma and papa—and that's the reason Cousin Polly brought her up here."

"I am going to be in it, too, Mister Bob," Julie flared; "I'm going to be queen, and I am going to fix me a throne like I saw on the stage, because my father and grandfather were noblemen, and I am higher than any of you."

"Yes, please let her be queen," Araminta urged.

"I'm going to be first lieutenant until I beat Bob shooting; then I am going to be captain."

"A queen's higher than a captain; everybody has to obey the queen." Julie switched herself to the chair formerly occupied by Miss Polly. "Get off of that fence, Bob, and kneel before me."

"A cap'in don't have to mind nobody; he's the boss."

Another break was imminent when Araminta exclaimed:

"Yes, the captain's ahead of everybody in the gang, except the mother; isn't he, Bob?"

"That's right," affirmed both boys, looking an ultimatum towards the self-crowned queen.

"And I'm going to be the mother." Araminta climbed again on the fence. "You want me to be the mother of the gang, don't you, Bob; and you'll mind me, too, won't you?"

"I'll mind ye s'long as ye don't fool 'long m'biznes. G'long, Billy, and git ye paw's gun, and I'll start ye to practicin' on the bigges' nest of rattlers ye ever seed."

On hearing this, Araminta, who had not been permitted to touch the dangerous rattles, began screaming as she saw Billy start to the house in execution of the order.

"You shan't go to a rattlesnake's nest! You shan't!"

Billy put his hand over her mouth as he saw Mammy Sophy come waddling and quarreling on the scene.

"Whut you doin' ter yo' sister, boy? I gwine tell

yo' Ma!" She attempted to force his hand from Araminta's mouth. "Turn 'er loose, I tell yer."

"Well, make her keep her mouth shut," his eye shooting a warning to his sister as, with the assistance of Sophy, she bit and scratched herself free.

"I am going to tell Mammy Sophy, too; I'm going to tell her right now." She flew behind the old negress, exclaiming: "He's fixing to go to a big rattlesnake's nest."

"Name 'er, Gawd! Rattlesnake's nes'?" With a fury that blanched her ebony hue, she turned on Bob, still perched on the fence. "You low-down po' white trash, you! Come heah puttin' yo' low-down po' white dev'ment inter dese qual'ty chilluns!"

She got no further, for, as if bitten by the deadly reptile in question, Bob sprang at her with clenched fists.

"I hain't no pore white trash, no sich a thing, you old nigger, you!"

The blow intended for Sophy fell on Billy's outstretched arm.

"Don't hit Mammy Sophy, Bob," warned Billy excitedly. "I'll hold her, but don't you hit her!" He strove unsuccessfully to pin the black arms that were dealing an angry defense of her little folk.

"Her nor nobody else hain't a'gwine to call me po' white trash." And the tears began to flow as he fought the combined strength of the woman and Billy.

Araminta ran to and from the house screaming:

"Everybody's getting killed! Everybody's dead! Run, run quick; everybody run!"

Mrs. Warner, Cousin Polly, and the Colonel hurried to the direction of the cries.

"Run, Mamma; run, Grandpa; run, Cousin Polly! All of them are getting killed!" frantically screamed the child as tears and blows fell thick.

Mildred Warner was the first to reach the scene. She pushed her way in the midst, halting hostilities, while Araminta embraced Julie, who, leaning against a tree, viewed the performance without emotion.

"I tole yer 'bout mixin' po' whit' trash wid qual'ty chillun," and Sophy trembled to go after the boy again.

"I hain't no pore trash; I'm jist as good as enybody!" wept the boy, clenching his fists.

"Den how come yer can't tork like fust-class fokes torks?" challenged the infuriated black.

"Go to the house, Mammy Sophy." Mildred saw the deadly pallor this thrust had brought to the child's face. "Come on, Bob; tell me your side first."

But his lips were dumb smitten. Truth had dawned with the last shot from the old negress. She had robbed him of his defense, for was he as good as they? If speech were the test, then he was not. He put his arm over his face and wept the first tears of mortification.

"There now." Mrs. Warner drew him to her as the situation became clear to the group.

Colonel Warner walked slowly back to the house, expressing regret at the criminal neglect of education among the mountain folk. "Our only pure strain of Anglo-Saxon in this country left to degenerate with-

out enlightenment or progress of any kind; left to degenerate below the alien races of black ingrates. So much misguided philanthropy to negroes, while true Americans are left to starve in ignorance and poverty in their native mountains."

Cousin Polly advanced toward Mildred, who was still trying to comfort the boy.

"I hain't never had no chance to git no book l'arnin'," he sobbed; "I kin read a leetle, but I hain't had no chance to go to school much."

"All right, Bob"—Mildred pressed the head of jet-black hair against her breast, and attempted to stroke the unruly mop—"you shall have a chance to learn; I'll see your grandfather, and see what can be done."

"Something shall be done at once, for I will give him a lesson right now." And Miss Polly rushed to the house for a Latin grammar and a Bible.

"You cannot start them too soon in Latin," she mumbled to herself, "and as for a reading book, the Bible is a spring of knowledge that slakes equally the thirst of the beginner and the scholar, and strengthens both with its mighty truths."

She quickly emerged with scratch pads and pencils, and resumed her chair of the morning beside the rug.

"All of you sit in front of me."

Billy started to demur, but the eagerness of Bob changed him, and the school was started again that day. For the first time in life Miss Polly found a pupil who lost not a syllable of her teaching. Neither she nor Bob noted the restiveness nor final disappearance of the others.

"Cousin Pol-lee!" Araminta called from the house. "Cousin Pol-lee! Mama says dinner's getting stone-cold—and she says, P-l-e-a-s-e to come on." Even then Miss Polly reluctantly closed her book.

She frowned on Araminta. "An hour after dinner, Bob, and we will resume; in the meantime during dinner you can softly go over to me, 'mensa, mensae.'"

"No, Cousin Polly, Bob's not going to eat at the table; Billy and I are going to eat on the back porch with him." She turned regretfully to him. "But Julie won't eat out there; I mean she won't leave the big table. She says she's a queen and can't eat with a captain."

"Waal, I'll jist show her I kin make myself as good as her or any of the rest of ye."

"Don't say it about me and Billy, Bob, because we think you and the Gray Eagle are dandy. We are going to help you to beat Julie, aren't we, Cousin Polly?"

But they ran ahead too rapidly to hear her answer.

Miss Polly entered the dining room breathing heavily from exercise, and though she could not as yet speak her opposition to Colonel Warner's tirade against lowering the children's social standards, an answering frown expressed her disapproval.

Mildred Warner defended her position. "The little boy is so ambitious, Father, and so lonely, I could not separate him from the rest of the children."

"I shall say nothing more, my dear." The gray brows knitted deeper when the noisy conversation from the back porch threatened to drown his discourse.

"I am learning my lessons of 'modern times,' progress so to speak, where the social bars are lowered to admit a rabble of——"

"Geniuses," Miss Polly managed to puff.

"I am shocked," and he looked the part as he laid his knife and fork across his plate. "Yours was the last tongue from which I should have expected the tone of social democracy." He pushed his chair back as though to rise.

"Wait, Father; please don't go; I want to talk to you about Robert. You don't know what big plans he's making as he lies out there under the trees. Did you hear that he's already about to buy more timberland? And put up a sawmill and build a station? He thinks there are tremendous resources here."

"Yes, he has been over the situation, but I am not willing for him to attempt anything for a few months."

"I hope you can influence him. If Billy were old enough to execute his orders, I believe he would begin to-day."

Notwithstanding Mrs. Warner's efforts to divert the conversation from Bob, Miss Polly indignantly returned to it.

"And yet with all of God's goodness to you, you refuse a morsel of learning to a starving scholar; begrudge social culture to that splendid little fellow."

"Great heavens, me alive!" he thundered, causing Julie's retreat to the back porch. "I'll build a school, hire a teacher, and do everything in my power to educate every one in fifty miles of here. All I ask is——"

"That they do not touch the hem of your aris-

tocracy, bah! Saint Paul says, 'Though I give all I have to feed the poor, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing.'"

The old man's eyes lost their harshness, and twinkled with the opportunity she gave him to twit her.

"Polly, according to Saint Paul, it would take both of us to make a perfect character. I am willing to give my goods, but no love, while you are willing to give all love and no goods."

Miss Polly chewed her food angrily. The Colonel waited with the keenness of a boy for her reply. It came in measured tones:

"Dollar donations are intended for the class of 'sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.' I give what is above price, myself."

The old gentleman threw his head back and laughed with the ring of boyhood. He had not teased her for many a day.

"So you'll swing to the dollars and give your love to the poor? My, Polly, but you are the soul of charity!" Again he laughed loudly.

Her face changed from red to white, and she pushed her plate towards the servant.

"Look here, Joseph; I am sick and tired of being eternally prodded about being penurious. It's cruel of you to say I swing to my dollars, when I am only striving to lay by a sufficiency so that after you are dead, and the pack of thieves have fleeced me, I will still have enough to keep me out of the poorhouse."

The Colonel chuckled.

"Everybody tries to cheat you, don't they, Polly?" he chaffed.

Instead of the expected response, she turned sadly to Mildred.

"I wish I had a son, or nephew, or cousin, all my own, some one that would stand by my property and would not be continually subjecting me to all this idiotic foolishness."

"He might take care of you, Polly, but it would take a safe-blower to get at your property; even the tax assessors have given you up."

"I refuse to discuss taxes. Mildred agrees with me over the injustice of squeezing money from women in the name of the law."

"It is indeed squeezing. I am constantly nervous lest you be called into court about your taxes."

"Merciful heaven! If I only had a protector! If I only had some one, some one; I am so tired and lonely!"

"Why, you've got Robert after my much-talked-of death."

But her sadness changed him.

"Tut, Polly; you know all of us will do anything on earth for you; for pity's sake laugh; do anything but mope. What do you want me to do about the taxes? I'll do it, if it lands us both in jail."

"I want some one who is my very own." She covered the trembling of her lips with her napkin. "And if you will let me, I will adopt this boy Bob. He seems to be the only person I ever saw who touches souls with me."

"By all the saints! you do need protection!" He left the table and strode up and down.

"Oh, Mildred!" she pleaded, "if any of you could appreciate the desperation of my loneliness!"

"Yes, I can imagine, Cousin Polly." She placed an arm about her as they passed up the stairway to Miss Polly's room. "I really think it would be a fine idea for you to adopt some one, say, like Julie; she——"

"Julie"—she stopped midway the stair—"I'd as soon try to warm a fish as Julie."

"Well, come and rest now, and then we will keep trying until we find exactly what you want."

"I know now, Mildred." She sat on the side of the bed. "I know exactly; it's that boy!"

"Take your nap now, dear, and don't think about it any more for a while." She closed the shutters. "The afternoon sun is getting quite hot."

Meantime the trio dining on the porch had no ears for anything but Bob's wonderful tales of the Gray Eagle. At first Bob was suspicious of their curiosity about moonshiners and Revenues, but their eager admiration reassured him. They were thrilled with astounding revelations, which he told in easy confidence. Billy's eyes stretched their limits.

"Bob, I'll help you to kill Revenues. Come on and let's ask Papa if he will let you teach me to shoot."

"Lord a'Mighty!" exclaimed the mountain child.

"What's the matter, Bob?"

"I done clean forgot to save part of m'dinner for Granny Tank." Instantly the hero shrank into the

proportions of a small troubled boy, whose interests centered in his home-coming at Witches Head.

"That's all right," Araminta cried. "I'll fix her a whole basket full, if you will get Papa to let me learn to shoot."

The children trooped down to Mr. Robert Warner's hammock under the trees. The plans of the gang and the gun club were unfolded at length. The mountain boy's shyness gradually wore off. His almost uncanny knowledge of the mountain life entertained the invalid, and arrangements for the future of the gun club took up most of the afternoon. At last when Bob started off, Mr. Warner called after him:

"Come again to-morrow, Captain Gray Eagle, and we'll talk about timber; you know the names of all the trees around here, don't you?"

"I reckin I do, and all the yerbs, too."

CHAPTER XIV

BOB picked his way back to Witches Head, keeping out of sight. His conscience pricked him for the lateness of the hour. But the precious volumes he hugged, his Latin grammar, his speller, and his Bible were antidotes against the harshness of Granny Tank. The pleasures of the day softened the fear of home-coming, particularly the recollection of Miss Polly. Somehow he did not think her ugly and peculiar, as Billy did. To him she was the kind friend who, in a way, was as lonely as he. She had begged him to love her. He would, too, next to his "Grandpap and Granny." He would work at his books exactly as she had ordered, that meant as soon as he fetched Granny Tank's fresh water; but then he could do that before she finished unpacking the generous basket of "vittles" he brought, after which he would kindle a fire under the black gum, and "learn m'lessons."

A dragging noise caused him to spring behind the nearest tree. "The Revenues!" He shivered. But in a moment he peeped out to discover Granny Tank stumbling and halting under the weight of a long board she was dragging. He recognized the plank as one of a number his grandfather had hauled to the châlet and piled outside the garden enclosure. Bud Hannon's tool chest was there, too. Bud was doing

work on the stable. What could Granny mean by stealing? Would she take Bud's tools also?

Just then the boy saw the plank fall and her aged body follow it to the ground.

"Lord, Granny, what be ye about?"

"God a'Mighty!" Trembling and relieved, she relaxed herself upon the ground. "Tuk the plank home quick as ye kin, and come back and git t'other one I pulled out'n the pile, and git Bud's saw and hammer and nails I fotched alongside of that scuppernon vine. I kan't move for a spell." She dragged herself so that her head rested on a mossy place. "I'm jist nigh 'bouts done for."

"What's a'ailin' of ye, Granny Tank? I kin fix ye." He laid the books carefully beside the basket on the ground and proceeded to open the latter. "Here's a bottle of coffee, Granny; drink much as ye kin of hit; and here's the best chicken ye ever sot a tooth in."

"Gimme the coffee; I hain't got no teeth to sot in nuthin'; ye kin have the chicken; gimme somethin' saft, and you g'long and fetch the plank."

"But, Granny," he hesitated, "air them plank yourn?"

"Yes, they air; God a'Mighty give 'em to me," with a scream of desperation. "G'long and git 'em, I tell ye."

He lifted the timber and dragged it the remaining distance to her cabin, determined however to make a clean breast of it to Miss Polly and ask her to ask Mr. Warner to let him "work it out."

Granny was still drinking from the bottle when he

started for the second plank, but when he returned she had gone to the cabin taking the basket, but leaving his books.

"Bob"—she hobbled to the door as she saw him arrive—"cut them plank into four pieces, a'five foot long; that'll be long ernough, I reckin. Make as good a box as ye kin; dy'ye hear?"

He dumbly obeyed her, unheeding an occasional moan that sounded from within the darkness of the cabin.

"Couldn't ye drink a leetle coffee, Tank?" She bent over a frame of rough boards nailed to the cabin wall, which, piled with ragged quilts, did service for a bed. "Hit's pow'ful peart'nin!"

"Gimme air, old 'ooman," the man gasped; "gimme air."

The sawing and nailing continued. Each hammer stroke reverberated through the woods, and smote the hearts of the pitiable creatures within the cabin. Tank way dying; he knew it, and his mate knew it. He was afraid to go, and she was loathe to be left.

"I knowd hit was a'comin' some day," she mumbled, dipping snuff and leaning over a few live ashes in the fireplace, "but I never thought of ye a'leavin' me by m'self. Lord, what air I a'gwine to do?"

"Gimme air!"

She rose, and for the first time in twenty years opened the solid window shutter in the front of the house.

"Kan't ye ax the Lord to hope me none?"

"I'm afeerd to ax Him anything." She crouched again over the whitening embers.

She did not note the flame of Bob's fire on the outside, nor yet its flickering light that exposed the interior of the mysterious cabin, not until a youthful voice broke upon her consciousness, picking out a Scripture lesson, spelling almost every word: "Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am ye shall be also."

Not a sound mingled with the voice, save the crackling of the fire outside and an occasional heavy gasp from the bed.

The reading lesson ceased, and mensa, mensae, began in monotonous grind. Finally the period of study ended with an old hymn, which Miss Polly had copied off for her pupil on a piece of paper. He did not dare to sing it until he thought Granny Tank slept, and even then he only softly raised his voice. "The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day."

Granny Tank softly approached the bed.

"Tank, ye hain't no meaner'n a thief."

"Ye reckin?" he wheezed with feeble hope.

"I know ye hain't," she roughly consoled; "ye hain't done nuthin' 'onery for a twenty year, and I b'lieve the Lord'll forgive ye for what ye done afore that."

"I wush ye could pray for me, old 'ooman," he gasped.

"I done forgot, Tank, but——"

At that moment the song ended, and the second piece of paper was held closely to the fire light:

"Now I lay me down to sleep——"

"Thar, now." The witch laid a claw-like hand on the arm of the dying criminal, terrified in the face of his final judgment.

"If I should die before I wake,
I pray thee, Lord, my soul to take."

"Thar now, old man, the Lord's done heerd ye; g'long to sleep. He's a'gwine to take ye; I know He is." She released her hold and once more returned to her snuff over the cheerless ashes.

The fire under the black gum tree burned down. The rays of the moon crept into the grotesque cabin.

The bent figure over the fireplace kept her vigil. The fitful breathing of the dying, now labored, now ceasing altogether, an inarticulate appeal for air, were the only sounds within the hut. The tired child slumbered heavily beside his books in the shadow of the forest.

"He's done gone now, I reckin." As the air grew chilly towards dawn, the intervals between the dying breaths lengthened and seemed to stop altogether. The woman rose to perform the last duties to the misshapen clay, and bent her ear to be sure he was gone. But the wretched spirit still stared out of his eyes. He raised his head once more; the will to live and the fear to die struggled frantically.

"Air!"

Raw Head sprang upon her shoulder and loudly mewed, while the woman still leaned over the dead man.

"Thar hain't nobody but jist me and you now, Raw Head," she mumbled, while the cat wandered restlessly about the bed, sniffing the old man and wailing.

"I wonder if ye air reely tryin' to tell wharbouts he's gone, Raw Head?"

She paused to question the cat, which, according to training or coincidence, humped up her back and gave forth a succession of spittings.

"I reckin ye're right; the Devil's got him at last, but I 'most made shore he warn't no meaner'n them thieves. But Lord a'Mighty!"—she hastened to the door—"I done clean forgot to git the grave onkivered he dug for hisself a'two year ago."

With difficulty she aroused the child, and only the shock of death tidings awakened him sufficiently to accomplish the uncovering of the grave. His senses became alert with fear when he was ordered to place the box he had shortly before completed beside the yawning hole. And when he was ordered into the chamber of Dark Arts to remove the body of Tank to the box beside the grave, a chill of dread seized him. He looked about for a way of escape, when the old woman clutched him on the shoulder and pushed him towards the bed, hissing:

"Don't ye try to let that kiver shake off of him so ye kin git a peep at him; if ye do, I'll conjure ye plum to the devil."

"I don't want to git no peep at him."

Scarcely was the new mound roughly shaped when the cat began rubbing against the boy's leg and playfully biting it. Suddenly Granny spoke to it. Instantly spittings and growlings answered her.

"Go on and tell Bob about Ebenezer's being kotched."

"Raw Head's a'telling of a lie, Granny Tank!" The first streak of day caught the frightened blanching of the boy's face. "I seed Bud Hannon at the Warnerses and he said he never heerd tell of nuthin'."

The ghoulish laughter that usually accompanied unpleasant information died on her lips, and she almost humanely told him to "Cl'ar out home, and keep ye eyes open on Jim Blower."

CHAPTER XV

THE sun was well up above the mountains when Bob reached the little valley cabin beside the railroad track, opposite the water tank. No smoke circled from the rock chimney that seemed to brace the entire structure. His heart shivered forebodings that splintered down to the tips of his toes. Faster he ran, peering about the cow lot for his grandfather's mighty frame doing the chores that were his before the "Revenues" got on his track. The calling of the cow for her calf alone broke the stillness of the hour. He skirted for the little kitchen shed in the rear.

"My Lord a'Mighty! that's Bob." And the gaunt gray-haired grandmother sat on the doorstep, and peered vacantly for confirmation of her ears. "I known ye soon as I heerd ye step."

"Where's——" But he could not frame the question.

"Gone! Lord, Lord!"

At that moment Jim Blower appeared around the house with a milk bucket.

"Oh!" he ejaculated at the sight of Bob and disappeared.

Life now began in deadly earnest for the boy. At thirteen years a man's responsibility fell upon his shoulders. "The store" called him. True it was but

a shanty, where a few rough shelves held a sparce stock of snuff, seed, tobacco, calico, tin pans, baskets, and cheap candies. Still, this was the only one in ten miles, hence its importance was not small. It was also the principal gathering-place of the community. Ebenezer's corn mill on the creek across the railroad track needed attention badly. Already sacks of corn had accumulated for the peculiar grinding of moonshine, and these business secrets could only be confided to Ebenezer and Bob.

In spite of his heavy heart the day passed swiftly, amid the untangling of aggregated duties. Only after nightfall could he indulge in the study of his "same lessons," or hark back to the brief pleasures at the châlet. His sleep was racked with visions of prison, behind whose gratings the patient face of his grandfather looked out.

He rose before dawn. The torture of his dreams was more difficult than the burdens of the day. If it were only possible to induce the customers to come to the store at one time, he could then get through his work and run up to the châlet for one lesson at least. But they straggled in all day long, sitting about for an hour or more before making their small purchases.

He despaired of ever getting to the châlet again or of ever learning to be "quality fokes" and rising in life, developing, like Billy, into a gentleman. Julie was farther away than ever. His jaws pressed together. "I will!" Angry, boyish tears sprang to his eyes. "I

will git to be as good as her if hit kills me; somethin' 'll happen; hit's got to."

Hearing the boy astir in the kitchen, his grandmother hurriedly dressed.

"I never knowd hit was s'late," she apologized.

"Hit tain't; I jist got up."

"As ye got the fire made we mout jist as well git breakfast." She started for the bread pan to mix the meal.

"Granny," Bob stopped dejectedly as he cut the slices of fat meat, "what makes me want to be a gentleman s'bad?"

Astonishment paralyzed the motion of her hands in the dough.

"Lord, boy, I don't know as how I knows what ye mean."

"I want to be 'quality' like them fokes is up thar. I want to be like them and talk like them, and do like them."

"Lord a'Mighty! who learnt ye to talk that a way?"

"Miss Polly Pockets, and, Granny, I'm a'goin' to do it, too." His efforts at correct speech fell with his hopelessness. "But I'll never git up thar to learn no more. Hit looks like whenever I git started to learn, somethin' comes erlong and I allus have to quit."

"Why, ye kin read the almanac as good as ye grandpap kin, and I don't see how come ye want to learn more'n ye grandpappy knows."

At the mention of Ebenezer's name, the conversation ceased. Bob took the milking bucket and started for the cow shed. It was too soon to milk, but he

would do it, anyway. Maybe the early start might enable him "to fly up yander for a spell."

From "sun-up" during the entire morning unheard-of numbers came to the store, not so much for trading, but to find out about Ebenezer.

The words were few that passed between these silent people. Few words were needed. Their hidden life current created a sympathy that with rare exceptions was strong and sincere. They sat about the store or in front of it, smoking pipes, others chewing their quids. Occasionally one came forward and made his purchase, remaining an hour after the transaction to ask and answer questions with as few words as possible, or perhaps just to listen.

"If I could jist write I could write a letter to Grandpap," thought Bob during one of the long conversational pauses. "I kin try to print one, enyhow." And he stepped behind the narrow counter to begin, when "Miss Hicks and her gal come with a sack of corn to the mill." The girl cast a glance of admiration towards the melancholy lad. It was lost on him. He lifted the sack of corn to his back, and without glancing towards his customers started from the store across the track to the mill.

"Whoree!"

"Hi there, Bob!"

"Wait for us!" came in a chorus from Araminta, Julie and Billy.

Bob dropped the grain and looked toward the sound. There was Miss Polly driving the yellow buckboard down the mountain road, and the children

waved handkerchiefs and screamed all sorts of delicious unintelligible things.

He would have run to them with all his might, but the presence of the mountaineers detained him. They would think he had gone over to the "furriners." Therefore, he stood rooted to the spot until the vehicle drew up before him.

"Why, Bob, what's become of you?" greeted Miss Polly.

"We have two guns to shoot now."

"And Papa's got something grand to tell you."

"And my queen's crown is already made."

He took up the bag of meal and bade them follow him to the mill.

The children's interest centered in the milling of the corn between the great grinding stones. Each had to start and stop the mill.

Miss Polly waited for the excitement to subside, then suggested:

"Let Billy and the girls watch the grinding, and you come say your lesson, Bob."

"But I got to git back to the store."

"Oh, let me keep store." Billy threw his arms around Bob. "I will put everything down on paper that I sell. Please, Cousin Polly, please Bob. The prices are all marked on the things, aren't they, Bob?"

" 'Tain't no use to mark nuthin'; everybody knows what everything costs."

"Then it's nothing to do; please let me, Cousin Polly."

Miss Polly was already seating herself in an old

broken split-bottom chair and pointing to a box for Bob to draw up. She put on her reading glasses and turned to Billy.

"If I let you go, will you promise not to get into any fights or hurt any one's feelings?"

Billy was gone. The two little milleresses, kneeling in front of the meal trough, caught the flour in the tin scoop and emptied it in the Hicks girls' bag before it touched the trough.

"It's my turn, Julie; you've caught it twice."

"Let me do it three times, Araminta, because I'm your company, don't you see?"

There was no portion of the mill unexplored by Araminta and Julie. They leaned far out of the rough window watching the water turn the big wheel, and cutting the power off and on to make sure of themselves at the next grinding. The quart, the peck, and the bushel measure were placed at hand for expeditiously measuring the mill's toll. Everything was in readiness for customers, but no customers came. They waited so long that they began to fear that Miss Polly would take cognizance of their "wasted moments" and make them join the lessons. They hid behind the mammoth grindstone, and whispered and hoped "somebody would come," until, worn out with waiting, they stole toward the door to go wading in the creek.

"Eny grindin' a'gwine on here to-day?" And a red-headed, red-whiskered, wiry man dropped his sack almost upon them.

"Fetch hit in, Mr. Smith." The boy started for the peck measure.

"Bob, please let us do it, and Mr. Smith can watch and see if we do it right." Both laid hands upon the peck measure.

Bob exchanged smiles with the man, and returned to Miss Polly's knee.

"Now, didn't we do it right, Mr. Smith?"

"Fur as ye wint, was right, but ye ought to a took'n two of 'em full for that mess of corn." He grinned, enjoying the odd manners of the "furriners."

They hastened to cover the mistake before it was discovered by Bob.

"I wish you could get people to come in faster, we have to wait so long between times."

"If the young bucks around here knowd purty gals like you'uns was a'grindin' ye wouldn't have to wait s'long." Again he grinned so that his short teeth set in deep gums held the children's attention. "I'm a'gwine to tell 'em; I air that." He reiterated this promise as he left. "I'll bet they'll come a'runnin', too."

As he walked out, another bag was lowered in the doorway. A tall, gentle-faced lad entered.

Bob glanced up. "Hello, Jim! Bring it over."

"No, you shan't have anything to do with it," commanded Araminta; "bring it to us, Jim; we are the millers, and we'll treat you right."

"Well, I don't know's I——" Jim hesitated, giving a signal to Bob. "I reckin I'll be a'comin' this way to-morrer."

"No, you shan't; we can do it just as well as——"

"Hold on, Araminta; put it in the corner over there, Jim." Then appeasingly, "You kin grind Granny some meal out of that corn in the barrel over there."

Jim, though reluctant, departed, and while Julie was half in the barrel in the corner, Araminta stole over and whispered in the student's ear:

"I know. Jim wants his ground for moonshining, don't he?"

The boy looked terrified, but she hastily put both her hands around his ear and reassured him: "I would die before I'd even tell Billy."

A relieved expression came to the boy's face as Miss Polly pushed her off.

"What are you doing, Araminta? Behave yourself."

There was no trading done at the store, except a box of snuff or so, but news was being absorbed that would last the folk for years. The "furriner" boy's manners interested the uncommunicative group before they had time to resent his intrusion.

"I'll tell you what"—Billy spread himself in the center of a group with both hands in his pockets and proceeded to give a repetition of his father's and grandfather's business conversation of the day before—"there is a big future for this section; there is; that's a fact."

The men puffed and spat, and gave silent but flattering attention.

"Why, the timber situation first, then the air; why,

an all-the-year-round hotel up there would pay out of sight for invalids. Sure!"

"Have a chaw, Buddy," proffered an old gray head by way of expressing approval.

"Thank you." He tore a bite off of the plug without the slightest hesitation. His manliness was at stake. He toyed with it, however, a while, as he had noticed several of his auditors do, and continued: "Yep, my father's going to start a lumber camp here in a few months, as soon as the doctor will let him, and he's going to give Bob a job right away."

"Air ye a'gwine to be one of the boss men? 'Caze if ye air, I jist as soon git me a job."

"I'll tell you." Billy felt ages added to his tender years as he put the "chaw terbacker" in his mouth. He took a pencil from behind his ear and tore off a piece of brown wrapping paper. "Just give me the names of those wanting jobs, and I'll put in a good word for you. But I tell you as soon as Bob learns enough he's going to be the camp boss, because"—he went to the door and in imitation spat copiously between his fingers—"I heard Papa tell Grandpa he was going to train him up for that."

There was great ado putting down names; each man stood to see the writing of his own, after which Billy began all over again to extol the prospects of the future. He would have continued indefinitely, for never before had he such an opportunity. But a clammy sickness came over him! He spat again, almost staggering to the door. He stepped outside, and sat carelessly on the root of a tree, pushing the quid

in the side of his cheek to let the new acquaintances see he was losing no atom of its flavor. Suddenly all the trees and men began whirling together. He faintly heard the alarm of Granny Tank given.

"Thar she comes—lemme git out from here."

It was as though a curtain of magic was raised for his protection. One by one the men sank from sight. On came the witch, moving her searching gaze from side to side. She saw the sick child under the tree; it was no concern of hers. She entered the store, but returned to the boy.

"Whar's Bob?"

Receiving no reply, not even a glance, she hobbled over to the mill.

She stood in the doorway long enough to take in the situation before she was discovered.

"Oh, look there!" Julie pointed at her and began to laugh.

"I'm jist a good mind to put ye b'twixt them stones and grind ye to pieces, ye little devil."

"Come in, Granny Tank." Bob sprang to help her take the high step at the door. "I want to make ye 'quainted with Miss Polly, Granny, Miss Polly's been so good to me." Seeing her face darken, he added, "But nobody's bin any better'n ye bin to me, Granny Tank."

She took her seat on Jim's sack of corn.

"Excuse us, Granny Tank"—Miss Polly politely leaned over Bob, whom she gently pushed back into his seat—"just a moment more and we will have fin-

ished. I am anxious to have a chat with you sometime."

Feeling the part of hostess devolve on her, Araminta went over and sat beside Granny. She remembered this was the person to whom she had sent the dinner.

"Did you enjoy the basket?"

"I reckin."

"Because if you will bring it back, Mamma will fill it for you again. She just loves to help people."

The hag looked into the child's pretty, generous face, and something within her that Bob once touched stirred her again.

"I mout come sometime, mebbe."

"Araminta!" called Julie, "you better come over here"—she sniggered suggestively—"I've got something to tell you."

"What's a'ailin' of that little varmint?"

"She's just stuck up; don't notice her."

"Waal, I'll be bound; she'll git stuck down low ernough afore the devil gits done with her."

Bob turned quickly and raised his hand. "Granny, don't put no conjure on Julie."

"Why, that old dirty woman!" Julie's temper measured with that of the witch herself. Bob sprang commandingly towards her.

"Hush, Julie! Hush, I tell ye!" he thundered.

For the first time something in his rough command brought the little queen to obedience. He hastened to the scowling hag.

"Please don't hurt her, Granny. She never knowd

who ye was. I'll grind ye some meal, and bring hit to ye, 'g'inst ye go over and hope my Granny git dinner." He helped her to rise. "I'll be home terreckly."

At noon he watched his friends depart up the mountain road. His impulse was to run behind and swing to the buckboard; but the store must be closed, Granny Tank's meal ground, Aunt Lys lifted and made comfortable, and the "taters" hoed. His spirits sank. He was not like them. He wondered why, and if he would ever be. A vision of the stern old Colonel rose up in comparison with the face of his grandpap, which, even as he thought of it through prison bars, touched his pride not less than his love.

He stepped the cross-ties towards home. The odor of cabbage for once failed to whet his appetite. He put Granny Tank's meal inside the door, and threw himself carelessly in a chair on the narrow porch to think. He was thankful that Miss Polly was willing to come to him daily for teaching. But he wanted to be with the children. Well, but they came, too, and, what was more, did his work while he "learned lessons." Yes, that was true, too! But he wanted to form a gang, he wanted to be captain before Billy learned to shoot and ousted him. But he would not be ousted!

"I'll beat him readin' and writin' if hit kills me."

A flash of light pierced his revery. "Lord, what was that Billy said his paw was a'wantin' me for. Hit was somethin' good; I jist know hit was."

It was past the dinner hour when he went in the house. Granny Tank and his grandmother were bent

over the fireplace, so absorbed in talking that they took no note of him. He turned "Aunt Lys," gave her another "doctor pill," and stood for some moments in the center of the room irresolute whether to take the time for dinner or go to "hoein' taters." He must see Billy and find out what his "paw" said he wanted. And though he moved within a few feet of the hearth, he gathered nothing of the indistinct colloquy between the old women.

"But nobody's gwinter b'lieve ye less'n ye got the proofs," sneered the hag.

"B'lieve me!" Mrs. Mason raised her hands, and brought them down on her knees. "Why, I'm s'feerd hit'll git found out, that I done hid all the proofs, and I keeps 'em hid even from Eb."

"Wharbouts is they hid, Hame?" demanded the witch.

"Right under this h'arth, under the rock my foot's on now." She answered, never doubting the security of her confession. "Why, Granny, I'd jist lay down and die if hit was found out!"

Perceiving Bob, the witch nudged her, and explained the action by addressing him.

"Bob, I got somethin' Raw Head tole me to tell ye."

"Lord a'Mighty! wharbouts did ye come from, boy?"

"I come from the mill. Yonder's ye meal, Granny Tank."

Mrs. Mason looked relieved, and touched the conjure-woman's knee for confirmation.

"All right, honey"—she started to rise—"I'll git ye

a bite of vittles, for I know ye're nigh 'bout starved."

"Sit still, Granny; I can get it myself."

"Hold on, Bob," called the hag as the boy started to the garden; "come back. Raw Head sont ye a message, I tell ye."

Bob returned and stood by the high rock mantel shelf.

"Raw Head says, don't let out nothin' erbout ye land, 'specially them that's got the thickest timber on hit. That's what she says."

"Lord a'Mighty!" the boy laughed, "thar hain't nobody'u'd buy our land."

Mrs. Mason leaned her chair back against the wall.

"I reckin the child's right; Eb's bin a-tryin' to sell ever sense the 'Gray Eagle' died, but ever'body 'round here's s'poor that——"

"How much land is ye got?"

"Bob and Eb together owns somewhar over yander in Fox mountain beyant here, to nigh 'bouts the head of the creek."

"Whar 'bouts air ye proofs?"

"Right whar I told ye," removing her snuff brush and using it in emphasis, "and hit's the same writin' that was give to the Gray Eagle's grandpappy when he fust come to these parts."

Granny Tank smiled benignly for the first time in twenty years.

"Now, I'll tell ye what B'lindy Kite said Bud Hannon told her this mornin' "—she caught herself and wiped her forehead on the bottom of her skirt—"but as for that I knowd hit a twenty year ago. Bud said

as how that sick critter up yander on Wigwam was a'gittin' well, and he was a'aimin' to put up a saw-mill in these parts, and he axed Bud if he knowd who owned the land nigh 'bouts here, and if they was a'wantin' to be a'sellin' of hit."

"We can pay Grandpap out!"

"Why, ye'd be cheated all to pieces," was the wizard's comforting reply. "And, ennyhow, ye couldn't sell nuthin' 't'out the old man was here to git the proofs fixed for ye; and if I ketch ye a'tellin' about Ebenezer's lands to that Warner critter up thar, Raw Head would put sich a conjure on ye grandpap that he never would git out of prison no more! Keep ye mouth shet and lis'en and wait tell Eb s'arves his time."

CHAPTER XVI

EBENEZER MASON sat on the back seat of the day coach. He was not conscious of the people, the train, or that he was the subject of a whispered controversy between the "Revenues." He was racked by a confusion of unhappy thoughts that rendered him insensible to his surroundings, and heedless of the occasional questions put to him by his escort.

"Who could 'a' squeeled on me? If Jim Blower done that"—his anger reached a climax, then died down with—"but he daresn't to 'a done hit. Bob's got that wrong. I know he is." And he wondered if the little fellow was safe and had gotten home to help "lift Lys." The picture of his sightless wife swam before him. He tried to brush it away and concentrate his thoughts on the line of action he would pursue in Atlanta. But the hopeless resignation he last saw on her face interrupted his thoughts and left him in a tangle of disconsolate reflections.

He was poor, a very poor backwoods mountaineer, who could not even speak the language of the great city. He had read about it, that is, spelled out something of it in the columns of straggling newspapers thrown out from the car windows. How often he had pictured taking Hame to the great doctor, who worked every Saturday for the poor, and now he was

almost there. He was at last to see Atlanta, but through the bars of a prison!

"Look here, Mason." A hand shook his shoulder. The three revenue officers stood about him. The seat in front was turned, two of the men occupied it, the third sitting on the arm. "We thought we'd talk a little about your case. Now, when you go before the commissioner where we make our formal accusation as soon as we get off the train, it rests with us entirely how strong we make the case. If we make it very weak, you will never be sent even before the grand jury. But if we make it good and strong, as it is, to prison you go and wait for a meeting of the grand jury, where you are sure to be indicted. Then you have got an eternal time to wait for your trial to come off, when you are sure to be convicted." The speaker paused, looking intently into the prisoner's blue eyes. "Think of spending all that time in confinement."

Ebenezer listened carefully, and with the simplicity of a child asked:

"Atter the Jedge convicts me, he'll let me go back home and work m'crop, won't he? 'Caze I have knowd a heap of moonshiners that's bin turned loose and come back home and made ther crops and gone back in the wintertime to sarve ther sentence."

"Oh, yes, the Judge will do that all right," said Sparks, the shrewd-faced deputy, who sat on the arm of the bench, "but what's the use of being convicted at all when fifty dollars will get a lawyer that will protect you before the commissioners."

Truth dawned at last on the simple-hearted moun-

taineer. He squared his great shoulders, and focused three pairs of eyes within his own.

"Look-a here, brothers, I don't choose no lawyers. Him nur nobody that's ever bin borned kin hope me now, for I am guilty of what ye've kotched me for."

"Yes, but don't you see," all began at once, "you can tell the commissioner your grandson was found in John Smith's still, and the copper worm in the yard was hidden there by Smith, and we'll say nothing about the whiskey under the house." They consulted a moment. "We really need not mention the worm, either."

"Look'a here, Revenues; I'd stay in prison and rot thar afore I'd sw'ar to a lie! There ye've got hit. All I axes ye is to git me afore the Jedge as quick as ye kin. I'm a'gwine to lawyer m'self with the truth. A lie never turned no good to nobody, as I have ever heerd tell on."

They left him to confer across the aisle. He knew it augured rough handling, but a little more could not hurt. The bustle of the city's highways made no impression on him, as he was conducted over paved streets, between tall buildings, almost under many of the draught wagons lumbering past. His mind only cleared to the vision of the cabin beside the track, opposite the railroad water tank.

Before the commissioner he kept silent, not even protesting when the Revenues exaggerated his case. He would bide his time before the judge.

Long, weary prison days dragged to restless, tossing nights. Rumors that the grand jury would as-

semble early buoyed him up at times, but these were soon contradicted, and hope deferred. His companions in confinement swapped tragic tales of the mountains that intensified the torturing forebodings about Bob.

"Supposin' them fellers kilt him and left him a'lyin' thar like they done his paw? God a'Mighty! I got to git out of here! He strode up and down the cell, often refusing the long corridors and fellowship of other moonshiners. Lys was dead, he knew she could not have lasted this long. Up and down he paced, striking out at the air as though to relieve the madness of anguish. He paused under the narrow window, too high for seeing anything save the blue sky with its patches of clouds. He raised his arms towards the high sill, and laid his aching head against them. The sense of his impotence overcame him and he prayed aloud:

"Oh, Lord, ye've pinted out to me that I hain't s'much as a turtle a'crawlin' on the ground, but oh Lord a'Mighty! don't let nuthin' happen to Bob!" Tears coursed down the now wasted cheeks. "Ye know Hame's blind, she kan't git 'long lessen one of us is thar! Poor Lys, I reckin she's gone." The pent-up sorrow of his soul broke in sobs that shook his big frame. "Hit's all right about Lys, Lord; I knowd she had to go, but not Bob, Lord, not Bob!"

Serenity followed this outburst, and a sorrowful peace soothed his spirits into patience. He would beg some sort of employment that would bring in a few pennies that could be sent home.

At breakfast the next morning a fellow prisoner asked:

"Kin eny of ye write? I'd give ten cents to git a letter writ home to my fokes."

Ebenezer's face lighted up. "I'll write as miny letters at ten cents apiece as ye kin fetch me," though he honestly acknowledged, "but reecollect I kan't do no fine writin'. I kin do good ernuf for ye fokes to know what ye're about."

In the days following he slowly and with difficulty plodded through their various letters. One dollar had already gone home to Hame, and another was slowly accumulating.

"Come on, Davy; I'm ready to do yourn. What do ye want to say?"

'Tell 'em," began Davy, "my time runs out next mont', and they must git me the money to git home on, somehow."

While Mason was heavily scratching on the paper and chewing his tongue in an effort to inscribe accurately the dictation, Davy's brutal face bent closer and, striking his fist on the table, he added:

"Tell 'em they got to send hit, if they haf to sell the cow to do hit."

"But, Davy," Ebenezer's eyes grew gentle, "sposen the cow's all they got."

"Then they got to starve. I got to git home."

"Waal, I tell ye," rejoined Ebenezer sternly, "I'll write this letter for ye, b'caze I have took your dime, but I hain't a'gwine to write no more for ye, and,

what's more, I hain't a'gwine to speak to ye no more, neether."

Davy's letter, which was the first that day, was scarcely finished, when the jailer announced Mason's indictment by the grand jury.

After his indictment, his feeling amounted to positive elation. The longest wait was over. The good Lord would favor the early calling of his case; he would be quickly convicted, paroled, and home!

"Oh, Lord, hurry the time; hurry the time," he found himself audibly mumbling; "hurry, Lord, hurry, hurry!"

Three days passed, days in which no letters could be written. The supplication, "Hurry, Lord," blotted out the ability to think.

"Get ready for court, Mason," the same pale-faced warden announced.

Again he was in the open. In the beautiful streets of the city and again his mind reached beyond its crowds and noises. Not until he was seated in the court room did his eyes take in his surroundings.

The room was very warm. He wiped the moisture from his brow on his sleeve. To him the people, the judge, in fact the entire make-up of the court was there, but for the purpose of passing sentence upon him, releasing him on parol and letting him get home.

"I wonder who's a'gwine to show me how to git to the train atter I gits m'parole." He searched among the faces about him for a friendly guide.

"Prisoner at the bar, stand up," sounded the voice of the clerk.

Ebenezer stood. The shoulders were a trifle bent, but the gray-crowned head shone with child-like innocence, as with honest emotion he fastened his gaze on the judge.

The clerk read the indictment. Every word fell like a hammer stroke on the prisoner's waiting soul.

"What say you, Ebenezer Mason; are you guilty or not guilty?" finished the crisp tones of the clerk.

Without a quiver the clear voice sounded throughout the room:

"I air guilty. But, Jege"—he took a step nearer the bar and riveted his eyes on the smooth-shaven features of the Judge, whose empty sleeve hanging from his left shoulder told its story of bravery and his appreciation of the brave—"hit was this'a'way: I was 'bledged to still m'corn to keep m'fokes from starvin'. Ye see my old 'ooman kan't do no work"—his lips quivered—"'caze she's blind as a bat—and m'old sister, she's jist s'crippled she kan't walk a step, and m'leetle grand-boy mout be dead—er now." The rough hand sought to hide the quivering muscles of his mouth.

"Ebenezer Mason"—the Judge's eyes belied the austerity of his voice—"did you know the law against illicit distilling?"

"I knowd I was actin' ag'in' the law of fokes, Jege, but I hain't done nuthin' ag'in' the law of God a'Mighty. We be pow'ful poor fokes whar I lives, Jege, and hit's tight stretchin' to git through 'thout starvin', I tell ye; still, I knowd I was ag'in' the law. And, 'cordin' to the law of fokes, I air guilty. All I

axes ye is to let me git home and make m'crops and lay in plenty of firewood so m'old woman kin make out. Then I'll come 'long back and s'arve m'sentence."

"Ebenezer Mason," and the Judge leaned as though to look deeper in the blue eyes of the prisoner, "you are an old man, and, I believe, an honest one. If I allow you to go free back to your home, will you take an oath never to distill another drop of illicit whiskey, so help you God?"

"Jege," came from under his breath, while his hand swept over his forehead, covering for one moment his eyes, "I don't see as how I kin promise ye."

"Never another drop, so help you God?" insisted the Judge as he recognized the man's ability to keep the faith.

"Ye hain't forgot m'old 'ooman's blind——"

"Promise," repeated the justice.

"And Lys a flat of her back——"

"So help you God!"

"And Bob——" but his lips refused to frame again his fears. Once more his hand went up to his brow and rested there.

The court waited in pity and silence.

"Jege," agonized the prisoner, locking his hands on the back of his neck, "won't ye let me say, I won't still narry 'nother drap less'n my fokes is down so low thar hain't no other way to git vittals?"

"Not another drop so long as you live, so help you God."

Again the Court waited. The silence was death-

like. Many eyes saw the prisoner's face through a mist of tears.

His arms dropped limply to his side, and he raised his eyes once more to those of justice.

"Promise."

As though in supplication, yet clearly, he said:

"I promises."

END OF PART II

PART III

CHAPTER XVII

NO sooner had Robert Noy Warner gained the doctor's consent to "interest himself in the mountains" than the surrounding woods became alive with tree sawyers and "log sneakers." Old Ebenezer Mason welcomed the activities. It increased store receipts and "peartened up things at the mill, too." But when Mr. Warner suggested the buying of his timber lands, or even offered him a partnership, suspicion darkened, and he invariably replied:

"The land's bin thar s'long 'thout enybody a'wantin' of hit, I reckin hit mout jist as well stay thar tell Bob gits big ernuf to handle the sittywation. I'm too old to gorm up my mind with hit."

Bob assured him he was "grown enough now" to advocate the sale. But the old man was inexorable.

"Hit tain't a'eatin' of nuthin'; jist let hit erlone! Bob hain't but a fifteen year old—and hit tain't expected he kin tell what's in his own head yit."

Though he made light of his grandson's youthfulness, yet his faith in the boy's wisdom was far greater than the lad's tender years warranted. The increased responsibilities Mr. Warner placed on him also filled the old man's heart with a silent joy never known be-

fore in his restricted, toil-spent life. His face lighted with the mention of the lumber camp, and pride gleamed with any allusion to the boy.

" 'Pears like Bob's gittin' pow'ful clost to the Boss up yander."

"Hit do 'pear like hit." Though his words were cautiously chosen, a smile of satisfaction wreathed his face.

" 'Pears like nobody kan't git no job less'n he hopes ye, too."

"Bob kin tell a man; I tell ye he kin."

"They tells me the boss man's chillun fetches ther dinner over thar to the camp mos' ever' day. I hears Bob gits a heap of good truck a'eatin' with 'em, too."

"I hear tell he do."

These conversations always ended with, "I reckin hit won't be long afore Bob'll be a boss man hisse'f, Ebenezer."

"I reckin ye're right." And dreams of his grandson's future now filled the long evenings, and his thoughts glowed with the hope that the boy would soon be "growd old ernuf to boss his own timber."

His fancy clothed Bob with the spirit of the Gray Eagle. He prayed for his life to span the time when, at the word of "a Mason," the countryside would again halt.

Miss Polly also was proud of Bob, not only for Mr. Warner's praise of his work, but for the boy's growth in his studies and the ease with which he acquired gentle manners.

She secretly paid the young college man, now em-

ployed as tutor to the children, to "insist on giving" Bob instructions at night. And often under the trees by the sawmill camp he plodded over his books. Most of the children's excursions led eventually to "the Captain's place of work." Miss Polly was as eager as the younger ones to be with him. These excursions were the essence of life to the young "Gray Eagle," particularly in the summertime, when Julie was of the party.

Haughty little Julie filled every moment of his spare thoughts. If he was not absorbed in adoration by some act of her gracious condescension, he was riled to determined revenge over some snobbish insult. Every hour of study or moment of work was based on "Just wait until I am a man—it will not be long now."

One hot September afternoon he was coming in from the lumber camp, riding sideways on a mule. The work harness rattled and clanked at every step. Bob did not think of himself as picturesque coming up the trail he had made to the châlet, nor yet as appearing uncouth in the eyes of his playmates. He was thinking of the excitement his gifts would cause among them. A large white bird, unknown in "these parts," hung from the mule's collar. It was big enough to make both girls a hat, but he wanted to present it royally to Julie, though still be sure that Araminta shared it. The situation perplexed him. Araminta should have both the young mocking birds he had caught, and yet he also hoped she would give Julie one to take home as a reminder of him. He

did not bring Billy anything, though he had a rock with gold in it, if his friend wanted it.

The young birds continually worked out of the improvised paper box. He had to dismount several times to regain them; the last time was when he was in sight of the châlet, and within hearing distance of the Tom Sawyer cave.

His shrill treble whistle that usually brought "the gang" in quick response failed. He caught a piece of the rope harness, and dragged the mule hastily behind him.

Araminta and Billy were already hastening to the house with their arms full of furnishings of the cave. Julie was busily assorting her mountain curios. It occurred to her to return Bob his collection of Indian arrow-heads, but, remembering Miss Polly had said they might one day be valuable, she neatly folded each in a separate paper and put it in her box.

"What are you doing, Julie?" A smothered sensation followed his words.

She continued packing while volubly diffusing her information.

"I am going back to Athens to-morrow morning. My grandmother is dying, and after the funeral Craigmore will be the Marquis de Layne, and I will be a lady, and we are going to France as quickly as possible. Craigmore told me his plans once before when Grandma was so sick."

"And I won't ever see you again, Julie?"

"Never!" the girl flashed.

"Never as long as you live?" he urged.

The little birds freed themselves, but he let them go and tossed away their paper prison.

"Billy and Araminta are going away, too, the first of the month. Billy's going to school in Virginia to get ready to go to the University, and Araminta is going to school in Athens. The châlet will be closed now that Mr. Warner is well."

"Oh, Julie!" was all the heartsick child could say as he leaned against the mule.

The sigh was lost on the girl. She was engrossed in the packing of her crown of royalty. The two upright snake rattles adorning the center front of this headpiece were causing untold trouble. Again she placed it in the box, and stuffed wads of paper to protect it from the weight of the gold rocks. But, still fearful for the safety of her crown jewels, she stood undecided.

"What will I do with my crown? Oh, I know! I'll take it to the house and put it in my trunk."

She placed it on her head as the safest mode of transit, when, with the act, the spirit of royalty possessed her.

"You may kiss my hand"—she held it to him preparatory to leaving—"that's the way they do in France."

As his lips pressed against the little dirt-covered fingers, he felt as though he could never let go.

"Stop that, Bob," jerking from him; "that's not the way—you must——"

"Julie, let me kiss your hand again."

"I certainly will not; no gentleman ever kisses a

lady's hand but once, and then he doesn't cover it all over with his mouth."

"Julie, will you forget me?"

She was moving off with her box.

"I expect I will. I'll never be in America again."

He stood still and watched her depart, then slowly led his mule on to the mill, down the other side of the mountain.

"What's that hanging to your mule, Bob?" called Araminta, running to the gate as he passed.

"Just a bird I stuffed." And he tossed the gift over the fence.

He did not return to the lumber camp next morning.

To his granny's oft-repeated inquiry, "What's a'ailin' of ye, boy? Is Mr. Warner hurt ye feelin's?" his unchanged reply was:

"Mr. Warner has not done a thing; I just feel like I don't want ever to work, or do anything the rest of my life."

"Don't ye?" She awkwardly stroked his hand. "I'm feerd somethin' pow'ful's ailin' ye."

He did not seek to join his friends at the station the next morning. Instead he viewed the party from inside the freight room through a small opening. When Julie was safely on the train, he returned to the sightless companionship of his grandmother.

All of them would soon be gone. It suddenly occurred to him that this was the meaning of Miss Polly's offer to send him to college. She was sorry for him. His whole nature craved to go, to keep

abreast of the others, yet he knew he could not be spared from home, even though he were willing to accept charity. Again he realized the difference between himself and these children of fortune. Toil and responsibility were the motifs of his life, while cultivation and pleasure were theirs.

"If there's a way to change my life, I'm going to do it." He clenched his fists and defied fate. Hope rose and fell as he performed the chores about the cabin. One moment ambition stirred at all cost to find the road to France; another, and it sickened under the spell of his homely necessities.

"If only I could just get off long enough to take a business course," he had confided to Miss Polly in one of the aching moments of his life.

And his benefactress in subsequent confidences warily led him along the lines of her desires until, before he had realized the extent of his committal, she had made all arrangements for the business course, and in less than a month accompanied him on his way to Atlanta. She snugly placed him in a convenient boarding house, and remained by him until he was accustomed to "city clothes" and "city ways."

He did not see the closing of the châlet, did not return to the mountains until the foundation of the big summer hotel was laid and the little station bore the mammoth sign "Haberwood."

Miss Polly would not have allowed his return at this time, she would have kept him away another two years, save that the antagonism of Ebenezer prevented the progress of the community.

As soon, however, as Bob became foremost in laying off the little city, the old man's influence shifted towards advancement, to enthusiasm, as the village began to spring up about him. Faith in Bob was the ruling passion of his life. Day by day he reflected how two years out in the big world had developed his boy, and he now readily consented to his partnership with Robert Warner. A few years later he insisted upon giving Bob a deed to the other half of the land. This the boy refused.

Young Mason did not appear conscious of the part he played in the magical development of the Wigwam Valley, nor his increasing responsibilities. A modesty uncommon to his years possessed him. Save for the visits and letters of Miss Polly, he had no literary or social companionship. After the death of his grandmother, he tried to persuade his grandfather to move with him to the hotel, but that failing, he still abode in the little cabin. His desultory correspondence with Billy, covering the years to his majority, ceased entirely, until one morning when Mr. Warner walked into the office in disgust.

"I've a great mind to bring Billy home and put him to work! He'll never get an academic degree, much less law. Just read that! Money, money, all the time! I'll not send him another cent."

Bob read: "Send me two hundred, and I'll work for you clear through the summer. I made all my tickets but one, French; I got fifty-nine on that when sixty passes. My class grade is eighty-three, but I went all to pieces on that French exam. However, I

only have sixty to make for the year. I also brought up the E, in Engish, to a C, which feat I consider of great importance. You see, I not ònly mastered a Jonah, but made up a condition. The rest of my tickets are fair; that one point in French is the only thing.

"Oh, by the way, I wrote you that I still owed the tailor a bill, also that I had to add to it for another pair of trousers for a perfectly good coat. Don't let Aunt Polly talk about patching. The whole seat was out, and, besides, I refuse to wear patched trousers!

"I'm awfully sorry to ask you for the two hundred, but you see it is the social organizations that cost so much. Our Frat pulled off a convention last week that swamped all of us.

"I made the Boat Crew.

"Tell Mother I haven't but two pairs of socks. I don't know where they go. Don't lay it on the Frat House; everybody's go the same way.

"I joined the Thirteen Club last week. That was very expensive. I had to borrow the money, and, oh, yes, I forgot to put that in with the two hundred. Please add fifty to it.

"I'm awfully sorry, Papa, but I am swamped with bills, a recital of which I spare you. They can wait, but I must have some cash quick!"

Bob replaced the letter without comment.

The stories of college life with which Billy regaled him during the years of his vacation work at the camp started up in his memory. He was hungry for the adventurous side of a life which Billy's narratives

reflected. And yet he couldn't imagine Bob Mason writing such a letter to his grandfather. The sweat of his brow had flowed since childhood for the maintenance of others, himself last of all. He sat for some time conjuring the picture of a man Billy's age carefree enough to make such demands. Later he wrote his old comrade, enclosing a hundred dollars, and ending with: "It is hard to tell which is uppermost, my condemnation or my envy."

Billy's answer was briefly inscribed on the returned check: "You've made a man of me. Write again."

Miss Polly formed the circle of his social connections until the little cabin, emptied of all its inmates, closed.

At this season of grief Miss Polly arrived. She bustlingly pushed aside the country folk hanging around, and, without giving Bob the opportunity to decline, convinced him of his duty to her, "a poor old lonely woman," to come to Halcome for a month or so at least.

Though Halcome was his place of residence for the succeeding six months, yet the city offices of the company called him early and held him late. Miss Polly did not force social obligations on him. Those that came naturally were met. The chief pleasures of this incongruous pair were the evenings spent in the splendid old library at Halcome. Both were lonely for congenial companionship, and they greedily enjoyed these hours of intellectual association.

It was a sorrow to Miss Polly when Robert Warner landed Bob in the Cincinnati office for a year. She

made a trip west to see him, but the visit did not prove satisfactory, and it was not repeated. She, however, never failed to write him once a week.

Bob did not return to Haberwood until the great water power development began to be projected. He was needed at the base of operations for acquiring the rights of way.

That year saw Warner, Mason & Company, the foremost lumber company in the South. Young Mason became a stockholder in the largest Electrical Company in the country. He was busy, successful, silent, kindly to all, but intimate only with a law student and two old women, Miss Polly and Granny Tank.

He had received no word from Julie except a few scant messages that came to him through the early boarding school letters of Araminta. Since Araminta had gone to Virginia to college, and thence to Europe for art training, she had ceased to write him. He only heard now through messages in the family correspondence. He had ceased to expect or desire more. His western trips diverted the trend of childhood fancies. He drifted more and more into the social life of his business associates of the large cities of the plains. His melancholy and silence grew into a dignity that was both forceful and pleasing. His tall, muscular figure was topped by a head of jet-black hair. His features, though large and irregular, bore a distinguished appearance. A compelling pleasantness hovered about his mouth despite the trace of grimness endurance had left.

"I'm going to open the châlet next week, Bob." Mr. Warner entered the office room of his junior partner. "Truth is my family have gallivanted all over the face of the earth, and just now found out that the old Hills of Habersham are the only place to live."

"You really mean that they are going to take up permanent residence here?"

"For the summer at least. Heaven knows what that means. My wife could not be satisfied until Araminta had made a bowing acquaintance with royalty and worn herself out generally. Now that both are frazzled out, they are returning to the simple life with me. Cousin Polly is coming up to-morrow with the servants. I have to meet the wanderers in New York day after to-morrow, so, if you will please keep an eye on Cousin Polly and Father, I will be grateful. I hardly think they should stay at the châlet alone."

A little throb of the long, long ago almost brought the inquiry: "Will Julie come, too?" But discipline silenced the impulse with the old word "Wait."

CHAPTER XVIII

PREPARATIONS at the châlet were completed to the smallest detail. Bob and Miss Polly had excitedly kept behind servants and workmen, until the grounds, through Mr. Mason's industry, were almost in good order. And in the house Miss Polly assured him she could "wipe up the floor with her pocket handkerchief, and not get a speck on it."

After this was accomplished a telegram announced that the travelers would go via Athens and Warner Mansion to divest themselves of cumbersome luggage.

Miss Polly was furious. The Colonel was indignant, while Bob's disappointment was keener than all, since a telegram called him to Chicago that night. Hence when Haberwood finally witnessed the interesting arrival, Mr. Mason was hours on his way westward.

Araminta drank in the green softness of the scenery as the train wound in and among the old hills. More eagerly still she peered through the window as the train slowed into the station. Her eyes craved the sight of the mountain restfulness she had left so many years ago. Instead of this, her gaze struck painfully on the big sign of Haberwood that seemed to weigh down the little station. Disappointment increased when the town itself confronted her. Hastily con-

structed store shacks were numerous along the newly cut red clay streets. Cheap brick citified buildings, two and three stories high, marked the corners, giving an air of hopeful solidarity. This was backed up by acres of stacked lumber and freight cars in the process of loading and unloading.

One dusty overworn automobile stood in the midst of a mottled assemblage of second- and third-hand vehicles, buggies, surries and old rockaways, all apparently from a city dump heap.

The girl's heart sank to the tip of her toes. It was a sickening contrast to foreign travel, where even the homeliest scenes of poverty are picturesque. The quaintly remembered mountain people stood around in the hot mid-day sun and stared seemed common. They walked inquisitively nearer the foreign baggage, with shifting glances at the tailored costumes of the arrivals. Every word or gesture was vulgarly watched.

Araminta and her mother stood uncomfortable on the corner of the platform, while Mr. Warner counted the checks to the baggage man.

"Come on; jump in!"

"Jump where?" asked his daughter, surveying the array of rubbish conveyances.

Robert Warner laughed gayly. "Why, the auto, of course."

"Father, where did you get such a horrible vehicle?"

"Jump quick; it's the only thing that will take these country roads. You're in the backwoods again, you know. Come on, Mildred; don't fret about your lug-

gage; there can be no possible dispute about it with the citizens of Haberwood?"

The engine started. They whisked noisily down the rough street, passing the pride of the city, the Haberwood Hotel. It was the only comfortable looking place the eye could see. They turned into the resident section. Cottages, bungalows, and shacks stood in all styles of architecture and no architecture at all. Their colors screamed madly at one another, a blue, intended to be light, but owing to a misunderstanding the color was neither deep nor light, but just painful. Greens, yellows, terra cotta, all conglomerately facing the once beautiful approach to the mountain.

"Oh, Father, how could you commercialize this beauty?" She covered her eyes.

"Turning up your nose at my machine, and now complaining of 'commercialized beauty,' when it has furnished the wherewithal for your splurging, young lady!"

"Oh, I didn't mean it, dear."

But she did mean it. Every word of it. The virgin beauty of old Wigwam had been calling her for a year. She had grown so tired of artificial effects, worn out with conventional life altogether. Something called her to return to nature, to simple and first emotions. She vaguely felt that in her hurry to grow up and in her earnestness to become a part of the world and to know its life, she had lost her way. The happy years spent on old Wigwam had lately come back to her restless memory. Slowly the desire had formed to bring her heart back to school in the sim-

ple life of the mountains; to see if she might not find the things she had missed in society and travel.

She wanted to be a child again, to be greeted by the trees and the flowers and the old mill dam, and her old barefoot Captain, half grown with his trousers irregularly rolled, striking unequal distances between calf and ankle. She wanted picnics, and the Cave, and the old yellow buckboard, and, in truth, she was homesick for nature, and surfeited with the luxuries that hid it. She did not join in the conversation between her father and mother. Not until they had chugged up the once romantic mountain road, now scarred by heavy lumber wagons, but under the same grand trees, and in sight of the peaceful châlet, did a sense of reconciliation touch her disappointment.

The châlet was blissfully quiet. It soothed and pleased, and gave her time to follow the varying threads of interest that seemed in the solitude of the pines to untangle themselves. Her dissatisfaction was less, since her mother, who though not in sympathy with her "foolishness," had agreed to give up the big house party she had planned at the châlet, and allowed her to decline an invitation to one in the Adirondacks.

Araminta regretted the unhappiness her "sudden turn" had given her mother. She would gladly have yielded to Mrs. Warner's social ambitions, but something stronger than herself compelled her to seek a more purposeful existence. She lay in the hammock on the porch, casting about in her mind for a definite plan, an object that would give her some real share in life. She could not decide what it would be; she

did not try to hasten the growth of the thought. Whatever it was would provoke the disapproval of the family. Better to let it slowly strengthen first, trusting with its development to win approval. She noted with indifference the arrival of the mail bag, but winced under the comments of Mildred Warner as she assorted the letters.

"Here is another letter from Rose Van Wilt. It was a frightful breach of etiquette, your declining that invitation, Araminta. Here, take your mail. Open Rose's letter first. I want to hear what she says."

"You open it, Mother; I haven't the face to read it."

Mrs. Warner emphasized each word as she read:

"Araminta Warner, are you crazy? 'Finding yourself?' It seems to me you are losing yourself at the rate of galloping lunacy. Don't dare say you are not coming to us for July. Bobby Smalta is going to take us all to Savannah on his yacht to bring you back. It would be cruelty to man to disappoint Bobby at this date. Wire me you have returned to sanity and will come. Don't fail to wire."

Mrs. Warner's voice ceased with the letter, but her eyes spoke reproach and disappointment.

"Don't look at me that way, Mother. I simply cannot help the way I feel. I really believe I'd physically suffocate in that crowd of rollickers this summer."

"You'll get over this foolishness by July, Araminta; three months is a long time."

"I know, dearest, but this is not foolishness, it is a feeling that——"

"That all girls have when they really begin to ma-

ture; fortunately with the majority it does not last. All I ask you is not to spring a 'career' on us. Try to pull through this stage with as few high lights as possible."

"Possibly you are right, but it seems very serious to me now."

Mrs. Warner's injured attitude kept the girl's conscience in a state of disquietude.

"Perhaps it is my duty to go," she kept saying to herself as she lay drinking in the stillness and beauty. "I ought not to disappoint Mother. I must go this once, anyway." And yet as the flitting memories that lurked about every portion of the landscape played around her, unconsciously her resolve to decline was strengthened.

"When is Bob Mason coming back, Papa?" she asked one morning at breakfast, missing his picturesque figure from the old haunts, especially at the Cave.

"That depends on what he can do with those Western stockholders; he's got a ticklish job out there."

Colonel Warner held a mouthful of hominy poised on his fork.

"What stockholders, Son? I thought you and Bob were the only owners of Warner, Mason & Co."

"So we are, but not of The Tiger Creek Electrical Power Company."

"But surely it is in no trouble?"

"Things are not as smooth as they might be." He looked towards the window in hopes of scanning a cloud. "It's the fear of a continued drought. Who on

earth could have figured on such a contingency at this season of the year?"

"I was thinking of acquiring some of the stock."

"Don't do it now, Father. Unless something happens, and happens soon to put heart into the stockholders, Warner, Mason & Company will go smash."

"You mean the lack of water will make you default your contracts?"

"Exactly, and Bob is simply holding the stockholders until we can evolve some way of outwitting droughts. We have another set of engineers now going over the waterways trying to find a plan to divert one or more streams into our dam. We can't tell the outcome for a few days."

"Thank heavens, I have laid aside the wrecking schemes of modern business."

"Oh, no, Father; it's a great game."

Araminta followed her father to the door. She was more serious than ever at the thought of the enormous expenditures for her education that seemed so barren of results; she was a parlor ornament, nothing more. She wanted to tell him of this regret and her willingness to make any sacrifice to help in the coming crisis. But he refused to listen and cheerily pinched her ear as he bade her adieu.

"Don't be so solemn, little 'Minta? Can't the beaux find their way out here in the backwoods?"

"Oh, Papa, isn't there any way I can help you?" impulsively throwing her arms around his neck; "I've been such a horrible expense."

He lifted her face from his shoulder.

"Yes, you can help a whole lot, just by being happy!"

"I can't be happy when you are in trouble; if I had only specialized in music or art, but, as it is, I excel in nothing."

"You sing better than Melba, and you draw the prettiest pictures of any one I know." He started down the steps. "If you could manage to make me a few sketches around here I would prize them way above those Whistler things your mother brought home."

Her eyes followed him lovingly as he rode out of the gate waving a farewell, and though she knew his desire for the sketches was but a means of occupying her, yet she determined to put her best effort in a series of pictures of her early haunts, and if they proved successful, it would give her a clew for future work.

She avoided the rest of the family in the library. Her mood called her to the silence of the forest, to some place still enough to let her hear the lispings of her soul, and under its inspiration to work. She escaped through the side door with her drawing paraphernalia, and wandered on through the woods in the direction of the Witches Head. Granny Tank must long since be dead, but the desolation of the spot would appeal to her. Inspiration sprang with the recollection of the old witch sitting in the doorway and the cat wailing upon the roof. She encouraged the picture which now elaborated itself in her memory, with scary recollections of hobgoblins that used to rise from the chimney as the smoke curled and wafted into

the shapes of her fancy. She discarded the idea of getting some one to pose as Granny Tank. The obtrusion of another presence would destroy the illusion. The impressions of the past, now strong, gained with every step. She needed only the physical surroundings of the place; her inspiration would people them. She walked a little out of the path to get the view of the house that faced the precipice over the rock formation that bore a resemblance to a Witch.

As she reached this point the signs of life about the place attracted her. A few steps to the side brought her in view of the doorstep, on which sat a woman in argument with—could her eyes deceive her?—Granny Tank! Apparently she was no older than when she used to threaten vengeance on Julie, and there she was, still giving directions against conjure.

"Good morning, Granny." And to the other woman, "How do you do?"

"I hain't a-doin' ertall," the latter responded, wiping an occasional tear that in spite of stoicism trickled down her sallow face; "my boy's jist nigh 'bout burnt his foot off, and him the only prop I got."

"G'long, B'lindy, and hold his foot clost as ye kin to the fire, and keep a-sayin':

" 'Devil take fire,
Fire take devil,
Devil take fire,
Fire take devil.'

"Say hit minny times as ye kin 'fore ye take a breath. When ye git so ye kin say hit a hunderd times on one breath, his foot'll git cured."

"Lord, Granny, I told ye the misery was s'bad he wouldn't let me tetch his leg, let 'lone his foot."

"B'lindy, ye never did have as much sense as a cat; g'long and do whut I tell ye, and fetch me a mess of them yaller yams, when they gits big ernuf."

Araminta's impulse was to expostulate against the conjure cure, but remembering the hag's senility, checked herself.

"I know exactly how you want it done, Granny." An idea came to her. "Let me run home and leave my sketching things, and I'll join Mrs. Kite down at the end of our garden."

She hastened as fast as the path choked with wild growth permitted. With the assistance of "First Aid to the Injured," which still occupied its place on the library shelf, she gathered up the remedies for burns and reached the garden just as the woman was leaving.

"Did you think I was not coming?"

"I wus feerd ye had fergot, and I knowd hit wus time I wus gittin' back to Jim Willie."

The groans of the lad were heard before they entered the house. His mother hastened in whining the prescription of the witch before her sunbonnet was removed.

"I kan't let ye do it, Maw; I jist kan't. Lord a'Mighty! Ouch! Git away, Maw; git away!" And the screaming child was almost in spasms when Araminta came gently in between him and his mother. She began her manipulations cautiously.

"I will not hurt you, Jim Willie." He still screamed

at every movement his mother made towards the bed. "We will do something else before we try Granny Tank's cure."

The delicacy of the girl's touch reconciled the sufferer to her ministrations as the lesser of two evils. After the foot was dressed, Araminta looked about for a more cheerful resting place than the big, ungainly bed in the darkened end of the room. A companion bed was the only alternative.

Without offending the boy's mother, she busied about in true trained nurse effort to make the best of the unkempt squalor.

"How would you like to move out under the trees, Jim Willie?"

"Nor, jist let me be; I don't want to do nuthin' but jist be still."

His mother bent over him.

"Couldn't ye eat a bite of vittals now, Jim Willie?" she asked anxiously.

"I kan't eat nuthin', but I mout swaller a leetle milk if I had hit."

A tin vessel of milk was hastily drawn from under the companion bed and taken in the kitchen shed room for skimming.

Araminta dared not protest. She had already gone in opposition to the "conjur," and stood in terror lest the act of disobedience would entangle her with Granny.

With each gulp the boy noisily swallowed, her fear of germs awakened as they had never done before.

"Eat a bite of this bread, honey; 'tain't corn dodger, hit's biscuit."

The girl's hand raised against the lump of half raw dough called a biscuit, but before she could protest the boy gave back the cup with a shake of his head.

"I kan't eat no more, Maw. I don't never want to eat no more long's I live."

"Perhaps if I cook something up at the châlet you might enjoy it."

"I never seed no rich fokes' vittals; I'd like to see hit, even if I never eat none of hit."

"All right, sir"—she stroked the hair from his brow—"don't you eat a thing until I get here to-morrow morning. You must get real hungry, so you'll enjoy what I cook."

She could scarcely restrain the impulse to "turn in" and give the room a general cleaning. She longed to snatch down the dried fruits, vegetables, clothes hanging from the rafters, and to pull off the newspaper pictures and seed advertisements that half covered the dirty walls. But suggestions at this time would have awakened suspicion against her and brought disaster on the maimed foot. Not only pity, but pride in the accomplishment of her task was at stake. Instead she sat beside the bed to divert the patient from growing restless. Seaton Thompson's stories acted magically. She told them with growing inspiration, until the midday meal approached. Its greasy oniony odors diffused through the room. The unpleasantness became

heavier as the room filled with the older members of the family and inquiring friends.

"I have knowd a ram to do jist sich a trick as yourn done," interrupted old man Kite, his breath heavy with the odor of "moonshine."

"Tell her 'bout the b'ar, Pap, that come down ever' night and kilt one of old Bet's pigs."

Araminta would willingly have listened to the fate of old Bet's pigs, but she was growing sick.

"Set longer, Miss; what's ye name? I knows you're Mr. Warner's gal, but I disremember to have heerd ye name."

Araminta made excuse to leave, and hastened to the railroad track, the most direct route to the village. She hurried to her father's office to ride up with him to dinner.

"Is my father in?" she asked of a dull-featured boy at the building.

"I dunno."

"Aren't you the office boy?"

"I hain't nuthin'; I'm jist a'stayin' here tell Jim Willie's foot gits so he kin be up and about."

"Well, you know Mr. Warner, don't you? Is he here?"

"He's done gone home to his dinner."

She dropped into the chair vacated by the boy.

"Isn't there something that I can ride up home in?"

"Mister Mason's hoss and buggy's over at the stable."

"Run, boy; get it hitched up for me. Say I'm Mr.

Warner's daughter. Run, tell them I'll be walking slowly, and to drive fast and overtake me."

Mr. Barns at the Hotel ordered the boy to wait. He was tremendously frustrated that he could not have added an extra touch to lunch. He always put on extra touches when the big business associates of Warner, Mason & Co. honored him with their patronage. But Mr. Mason had dropped down suddenly with six men, and caused the further trepidation that the "fancy dishes would not hold out."

"I got to fetch him, I tell ye," protested the boy as he scuffled with the porter who tried to eject him. "Mr. Warner's gal is waitin' to git home, I tell ye, and she sont me atter him."

The porter yielded, and the boy delivered the message.

Mr. Mason left his lunch unfinished. He sent the boy ahead to order his buggy, and distancing him to the stable, helped to hitch the horse and came trotting through town at the rate of a fire chief. As he turned into the mountain road he caught sight of a girlish figure.

"Hold on! Stop!" he called at the top of his voice. As it produced no effect, he feared a mistake. He would make sure by trying his "Captain Gray Eagle's whistle." Before the piercing sound had time to echo through the hills, Araminta's head turned; but, as she did not recognize the young man driving towards her, hastily looked away.

"I'm awfully sorry you had this pull."

The girl did not glance around again.

"One of my father's drummers," she thought. "He must be put in his place."

Scarcely turning her head, she said: "You have the advantage of me, sir."

In the same moment Bob Mason sprang from the buggy, calling:

"Araminta! I might have expected such a greeting from Julie, but not from you."

"You are not"—she put her hand to her throat—"Bob? Impossible!"

"I'm still known by that name," he laughed.

She dropped limply on the grassy side of the bank and laughed immoderately.

He felt to see if his collar and cravat were in place.

"For pity sake, what's the matter with me? Am I such a joke?"

She still laughed as she got in the vehicle beside him.

"It is not you; it is I. You see, I was looking for Captain Gray Eagle, my old play fellow, and here I am confronted by a grand distinguished gentleman! But how did you happen to be here? I thought you leagues away—out West?"

"I brought the West back with me; six of them, the livest business men it has been my fortune or misfortune to meet."

"I'm afraid you were disturbed at your luncheon with them."

"Oh, it's all right. Your father's going to have them up to supper at the châlet to-night."

"Good gracious! it seems impossible to get away from the social side of life."

"Better not go too fast, one grows weary of the backwoods after a time."

"I love it. I'd be willing to live here all my life, and be an old maid like Cousin Polly." She turned squarely on him. "You know I almost hate men."

"Thank you."

"Egotist, like all the rest."

Despite the lightness of the conversation, Araminta gathered from the earnestness of his face the strength underlaying it. She turned smilingly.

"It is awfully good to see you; without knowing it, I expect you are the very person I have been needing."

"When will you know for certain?"

A kind of half smile lightened the seriousness of her reply:

"Maybe soon, maybe not for a long time. But when I do, I really believe you will be the very shield I will need to protect me from the family."

"Shields usually mean war."

"It will be war, I'm afraid," she laughed, "but here we are at home. And you must hurry back to your guests. Thank you for bringing me up, and be sure to come early to-night."

The evening, though novel to the Westerners, was concluded early. Simultaneously with the striking of ten came the end to one of Colonel Warner's thrilling reminiscences. Mr. Farrol compared his watch with the clock, and the hour being verified, rose despite remonstrance.

"No, sir; it is the duty of every man to be in bed as near ten as possible. 'Early to bed, and early to rise,' you know. We will come up to-morrow night and pay our respects, and you can spin us another 'yarn,' Colonel."

Joseph Warner was rather startled at the designation of "yarn" describing any portion of his distinguished existence, but Mr. Farrol's good-natured expression dissipated the feeling.

"Certainly come up to-morrow. Come to supper, too; this will be about your only diversion in Haberwood."

"Very glad to do it, very glad! Where's Mason? Why, I thought he was here." The kind old man looked about with a proprietory air.

Out under Cousin Polly's old school tree Araminta and Bob were bridging the years that spanned from childhood to the present delightful hour. Canyon's mountain rig stood waiting. It was dangerously near its aged capacity with the evening's guests.

"Hi, there, Mason; it's after ten o'clock!"

Bob left the history of Julie, snobbish, charming little Julie, in the most interesting part, and rattled back to the hotel.

On the way the Electrical Company's affairs were opened up again. The pros and cons likely to arise from a good or bad report of the engineer were predicted. Young Mason patiently listened, longing the while for the seclusion of his own room, where he could think over his interesting conversation with Araminta.

They entered the hotel lobby. It resembled only itself and perhaps other country hotel lobbies at ten-thirty at night, unkempt and deserted. The clerk was asleep over his paper, and was drowsily aroused to deliver keys.

Mr. Farrol started direct to his room, but, seeing the others preparing to seat themselves, returned.

"Look here, Mason, you go to bed. These people have got plenty of daylight down here to talk business; you go on and go to sleep."

"Wait a minute!" the clerk called, seeing Bob turn to leave. "Mr. Ford told me to tell you he was back, and if you came in before half after ten he would stay awake for you."

Led by Mason, the stockholders eagerly turned towards engineer Ford's room. They saw the light over the transom wink out as they were within four feet of the door. This did not deter them. It flashed on in a thrice thereafter. The small room filled quickly. Ford's working clothes were brushed from one chair to the floor; his grip on the other was removed. The four remaining gentlemen seated themselves on the bed, drawing the bedclothes so taut that Ford lay as in a vise. Mason stood leaning against the door jamb.

The committee of stockholders made no effort to conceal their gratification over Ford's report. He guaranteed that, with the additional waters of Bear river, the company would be protected from future droughts. This, of course, necessitated the changing of the river bed, meaning the purchase of more land for the new course, and, worse still, the acquiring of

riparian rights along the old banks. It meant another big outlay of money.

Bob knew it meant his banishment. The task of acquiring all these lands and rights always fell to him, and though not difficult, yet it required an eternity of patience and time to deal with the backwoods characters. The many evenings he could have spent with Araminta were now doomed to the sing-song drawl of illiterate argument.

Another hour of exhausted argument with Ford, and the party dispersed for the night.

Bob switched on the light in his room. Never had he noted its barrenness before. On the contrary, it had seemed luxurious in comparison with the cabin. Comparison with other hotels never occurred to him. It was so wonderful for Haberwood to possess a hostlery at all, that its deficiencies were never suggested. But to-night the hospitality of the châlet pervaded his senses. He noted critically the cracks across the bare wall space before him. The only picture in the room was one of Mr. Farrol's daughter in a silver oval frame on his cheap brass-trimmed bureau. A bachelor's traveling case with silver toilet articles, also Miss Farrol's gift, lay open beside it. The bed and mattress sagged in the middle. Though not uncomfortable when one was accustomed to the hollow, yet it looked forlorn and cheap. The flat-top desk, covered with blue prints, weighted down at the corners with ink stands, rulers and geological specimens, together with the array of books in the sectional bookcase, suggested the work and interests of the man.

He crossed to the bureau and removed his hat, paused for a moment at his reflection in the mirror. Without conceit, he felt that his smooth-shaven features and well-groomed figure would compare favorably with the best, and yet his surroundings did not measure up to his appearance. He looked about him again in a helpless sort of way. He must marry. Very few men knew how to make themselves comfortable, especially those like himself, who had been reared in ignorance of comforts. His gaze lingered a moment on the handsome face in the silver frame.

"Yes, I owe it to myself to marry." He picked up the frame and looked closely at the face. "She's a fine woman, fine, not like Araminta or Julie, but sensible and kind; not intellectual, but a fine home maker. I think I'll ask her."

He had gone into the social life of the larger cities more for polish than for pleasure. He enjoyed it, too, and had thought about marriage in a vague way, but never definitely. He lighted a cigar and raised his feet across the back of a chair in front, and continued to muse on the picture still facing him.

"I wonder if she would be congenial with Araminta and Julie?"

Julie was still unmarried and in deep distress. The account Araminta had given of Craigmore's wild extravagance; his refusal to permit Julie's alliance with her cousin on account of poverty, his intentions of retrieving their fortune by a mercenary alliance through his sister disgusted and infuriated Bob.

"Poor little Julie!" He was sorry as he remembered

the day he had made her serve as sentinel before the Cave. The gun was heavy and she had cried, but he made her do it to prove his leadership.

"Poor little Julie." He could see those tears now! How slight were they in comparison to the bitter ones she had since shed. Dear little girl. Araminta had accused him of always having a soft place in his heart for her. He wondered if he had, and if so, was it likely to return? He lowered his feet to throw the cigar stump out of the window. His eyes encountered the face in the frame.

"Fine woman, fine! I wonder if Araminta is right? At any rate, Julie is in trouble, and I must find some way to help her."

CHAPTER XIX

WHILE Araminta faithfully worked on the sketches for her father, much of her time was spent preparing meals for her patient. His improvement inspired her. She was not only restoring the disabled foot, but was helping the entire family by lessons she skillfully brought out in the literature she read ostensibly to the boy. It was a regret not to be able openly to reconstruct their unsanitary living.

It annoyed Mrs. Warner to see her constantly in the kitchen trying to learn to cook in order, when the opportunity offered, to be able to teach Belinda Kite. The question now was to make the opportunity; how to break through the pride of these simple sensitive people. Possibly Cousin Polly could help her; she seemed more in sympathy with new movements and new thoughts than her mother.

She came out on the kitchen porch to get some jelly for Jim Willie when Miss Polly passed on her way to the woods for roots. The old spinster insisted that the tea from her gatherings was the only panacea for her ills. And while she acknowledged many ailments, she bitterly resented the necessity of a companion upon her excursions.

"Wait, Cousin Polly! Do let me go along!"

"If you really want to go, I'll be glad to have you,

but do not come with the foolish idea of protecting me. I'm stronger than any of the present generation now."

Araminta took the camp stool, and would have carried the basket, but Miss Polly had no idea of appearing "helpless."

They wandered along in path and out of path, making perilous quests among "snaky-looking" bushes. Miss Polly was too engrossed for conversation at first. The girl followed silently, disentangling the old lady every now and then from briars and thorns.

"Cousin Polly," she began at last, "I wish I knew how to help these people around here."

"You mean 'uplift,' I suppose."

"I despise that word 'uplift'; it is the tongue-morsel of an army of I don't know what to call them, but most of them are idiots."

"Why, child, what do you mean? Surely you are not alluding to the Industrial School people, or——"

"No, indeed; they are splendid; but still they are not touching the vital spot."

Dropping a root from her trowel, the old lady stared. "Vital spot! What do you know about the vital spot of economic conditions?"

Araminta went on ignoring the sarcastic attitude.

"Well, I know the conditions in the Kites' home are general throughout this region, and I know they are untouched by the Industrial School so far, and will be until the present pupils are grown. And then what good does that little school do that lasts three months in the year and barely teaches the alphabet."

"Why, Araminta!"

"Oh, I haven't been able to relish a meal since I've seen the state of affairs at the Kites'. The worst of it is, everybody's conscience is clear because of that little three months, affair over there."

Miss Polly became too interested in her search to follow closely the girl's lament, and only the words caught her ear:

"If I could only teach them how to cook or interest them in sanitation."

"Well, for goodness' sake! Here, give me my camp chair."

The girl unfolded the chair, and Miss Polly sat down heavily, partly from fatigue and partly from astonishment. She pushed her spectacles above her forehead.

"Let's get at the bottom of your 'uplift' work. First of all you couldn't cook a potato with the skin on it; second, you've never cleaned your own room in your life, and yet you are choking and sputtering to teach not only children these things, but their mothers, women who are twice your age and know more about practical things than——"

"Oh, Cousin Polly, why will you not understand; I said——"

"You said that you wanted to teach the parents as well as the children how to cook, raise vegetables, and hogs, and children, didn't you?"

The girl laughed delightedly.

"I said every word of it, and you have given me a glorious idea."

"I hope it was not encouragement of your criticism of veterans in this work."

"Dear Cousin Polly, I did not mean any criticism of the Industrial School people. They are all doing their part, as far as it goes, but their means are so limited; they reach such a few; none in this section. What good would a drop of rain, or even a tub of water, do towards relieving the Electrical Company's condition? We need a constant stream of money and earnest workers to save the mountain districts. I want to help as many as I can. And I want to begin now!"

"How can you teach what you have never learned?" The old woman was melting under the earnestness of the beautiful face.

"I have cured Jim Willie's foot by studying all about burns. I took a course of domestic science at college, which, with brushing up a little and plenty of good reading, will put me in position to teach people wholly ignorant. If I only taught them the dangers of keeping the milk under the bed, and not to float their food in grease, I would be the means of saving many a life."

She detailed the meals at the Kites' house so graphically that Miss Polly sympathized. Later she gave in sufficiently to avow her willingness to do what Bob thought was necessary and sane. Bob knew how to handle the mountain people; he knew how to handle any business arrangement; he knew everything in Miss Polly's eyes. "What Bob says," was the creed of her life. The girl's expression softened as she looked into the wrinkled face of her aged cousin, whose idolatrous

affection for her protégé lightened her declining life. The conversation now drifted to Bob. Miss Polly was riding her hobby, and Araminta led the way back to the châlet.

Bob took up Araminta's idea with alacrity, and every spare moment they spent together working among books and magazines bearing on the development of rural schools and conditions.

They finally decided to direct their aims to child life on the farm, by the easiest and most natural methods. It was not to begin with books, but with work, practical work in the home and fields. The duties should first be introduced as play without the children realizing they were learning lessons in agriculture or domestic science. When the need for technical training was felt, that training would be specifically given, and would be eagerly acquired, because it would meet with a specific need.

Bob offered his grandfather's cabin and grounds for the experiment.

"That's the very thing you want, Araminta," exclaimed Miss Polly enthusiastically.

"Not so fast, Bob," said Mr. Warner, "you have forgotten the warehouse building that is to occupy that frontage."

"Not at all," answered his partner; "expenditures are at a standstill with us for the present."

"Hush, Papa, don't throw cold water; this work is more important than your old store. You see we are going to teach the mothers as well as the children, and that cabin is the very place. Every one coming

or going will have to pass it. I'm going to fix it up neatly and sweetly, and entirely within the purse of the poorest. Little vines and flowers will make a big difference, and illustrate what can be done without expense, and still enhance the comfort and beauty of their surroundings. Bob is going to lay out the grounds so that each child can have a square to cultivate. He is going to teach them how to get the most out of the soil."

"Intensive farming?" put in Miss Polly. "But you mean Bob is going to supervise it? He can't leave his affairs."

"Of course," answered Bob, "I am going to put a regular man in, Miss Polly, but I am going to take a hand too."

Colonel Warner suggested with disgust:

"You had better get some one to run the entire thing. It's a mammoth piece of foolishness, but if you are determined to do it, some one had better be brought who will really handle it, at the same time let you fool yourself into thinking you are doing it all."

"Grandpa, you don't really think all that; but as a fact I am going to write to-night to Miss Wilson for an experienced person."

Miss Polly and Araminta worked at the school early and late. Mr. Mason could hardly attend to his business on account of it. Instead of fretting over the crisis that threatened to reduce him to "a fresh start in life," he remonstrated with Mr. Warner for his pessimism. His greatest unhappiness was that he had to spend most of his time across the mountains buy-

ing up the water rights. And though this work did not consume half the time he expected; yet it grew more tiresome as it dwindled to the close; most exasperating when, at the very end, the key to the whole situation was blocked by the widow Filpot, who owned a triangle of barren land that separated the Electrical Company from its goal. All of his tedious labor was in vain. Not only his own fortune and that of his partner was at stake, but the tremendous investment of other stockholders was doomed, unless this woman, too old and ignorant to be reasoned with, could be induced to accept many times the value of her property. She not only refused to see Bob, but, hearing "he was a'grabbin' everybody's land and a'turnin' fokes right out of their own cabins" stationed her grandson on the outside of her shanty to prevent intrusion. Although she overheard many assurances given by Mason and his agents to her grandson of the mutual benefits sure to accrue from the transfer of the stony angle of mountain land, her mind was too darkened and disordered to understand, and she stubbornly held out against persuasion and bribe.

The complication caused a panic at the Chicago end. The stockholders were, however, persuaded to rest on the promise of her heir to relieve the situation as soon as he came in possession, which was expected at any time.

Of all of the owners of the big syndicate, Bob alone was hopeful. Mr. Warner daily conferred with his young partner as to the advisability of closing out be-

fore they were forced, but the other refused to consider failure.

"It is coming out all right, I tell you. The doctor told me last week, when she fell in the fire, that he thought she had fits. She'll fall in again some time when her grandson is not there to pull her out. And even if the worst comes, we are not afraid of work. It's worth the risk."

The young man was indeed beyond the feeling of fear. The long drives with Araminta about the country, "seeing people," had transformed the serious trend of his mind into one of broader, higher ambition. He was conscious of an added strength that came with this development. His courageous spirits kept heart in Mr. Warner, as day by day the enterprise of the Electrical Company precariously kept its contracts to furnish light, and with increasing difficulty kept up the faith of its Chicago stockholders. As the crux of the situation was securing a deed from a mountain woman, Bob was the recognized expert in the case. And he reassured the stockholders in good faith. His mood, inexplicable even to himself, was so tuned that he could not accept the thought of failure. He seemed full of energy, of thought, and of action that infected the others with a faith in the ends at which he aimed.

Araminta's return to the mountains had been as a dream to him. In the beautiful companion, whose womanly grace fascinated him while her swift touches of independence challenged him, he could find nothing of the docile little girl who used to run over the hills

beside "Captain Gray Eagle." How splendidly had she gone to the root of things with these humble people! Who else could have handled a question of such delicacy so efficiently? In the surroundings of squalid poverty her sympathetic personality took on even richer charm. There was never a shade of condescension in her approach to these mountain people. She was one of them by some divine instinct, sharing their woes and suffering. The manners and whims of society fell from her. Coming upon her unexpectedly as she sat in a cabin working out the problems of the family, even Bob saw in her less of flashing young beauty than of simple, earnest love of human kind. He felt foolishly happy for the privilege of assisting her in her work; at the absolute faith she placed in him, and the many intimate conferences it led to. She had said to him one evening on leaving the school:

"You know, Bob, I believe you have struck the keynote in demanding that the parents bring their children for entrance. If I once get the mothers there I'll warrant to interest them sufficiently to make them return."

"I have every faith in your boast," he chimed in, in frank admiration. "I believe you could even make the widow Filpot sell her land."

"Would you like me to try?"

He laughed aloud: "And meet with violence?"

"But if I went to dress her burns? You know I am a burn specialist."

"Yes, but our camp physician got the call first."

"Really, Bob, let me try."

"Not for the world. Why she tried to kill old man Dooley a month ago. When I was up on Wild Cat ridge buying up rights, I had to see the old man, and I declare the sight has haunted me. It's terrible to see a man's hut tumbling down on him."

"Is he afflicted?"

"Of course not; and that's the point! He has a wife and two strong sons; they are simply lazy, indolent, good for nothing."

"But there must be a reason."

"Not the shadow of it. Fifteen years ago my grandfather cut enough logs on some land abutting upon Dooley's five acres for a new cabin; and he gave them to him for the hauling. His house at that time was so insecure that my grandfather helped him to bolster it up until the new one could be completed. Will you believe it, that not until the boys grew big enough, ten years later, did he take those logs from the forest? And I saw them still lying in the yard piled where the boys left them five years ago. I have no doubt they will continue to lie there until they rot. Now what is to be done for people like that? Think of it."

"Yes, think of it! It makes me feel desperate, but we must find a solution."

There was no reason for them to linger after board meetings to chat over topics that would be brought up again during his evening visit at the châlet. But they did. Their enthusiasm never seemed to slacken. As the size of the task of regenerating home life in Wig-

wam Valley unfolded before them, their spirits rose to meet its demands.

Mrs. Warner was at first rebellious over Araminta's altruism. She had expected the girl to distort her appearance and attainments into the unattractiveness of the country "school marm." Araminta not only failed to take on these characteristics, but, under the stimulus of inspiring work, all the accomplishments her mother so fondly cherished developed in power and brilliancy.

Colonel Warner noticed a new charm in his granddaughter's music. Her "evening concerts" were to him the soothing note of the day, for they always ended with old ballads, where the blending of Miss Polly's contralto added a softness to the memories they touched.

At the end of one of these evenings, when the music seemed to shade into lugubrious selections, Araminta suddenly left the piano and called Bob from the porch. For a moment he looked at her face.

"Well," he exclaimed, "those melancholy ballads are as evident in your face as they were in your voice."

"It's not the music; it's the Dooleys, those poor, lazy Dooleys, that are haunting me."

"I am certainly sorry I stirred you up about them."

"You haven't at all."

"Certainly I have, and made you despondent over your work. Forget it, let's look at a more agreeable side."

"Indeed the Dooleys' case represents exactly the side I most want to hear. How am I ever to better

conditions unless I know where the need lies? Sit right down and let's start at the beginning of these people."

"It is too late to-night. Your grandfather has already marked the hour, but we will discuss it fully to-morrow afternoon. By the by, on our way to George Phillips', we will drive near a place almost as bad as the Doolcys'."

Colonel Warner appeared in the door. Araminta regretfully allowed Bob to leave, but lured her grandfather into his study, where they lingered until a late hour, discussing the manners and customs of the people he had first known in the early days of the châlet. She was convinced some remote reason was responsible for such sloth, and she determined to find it.

Next day she studied the faces of the school children, noted the varying minds, and when due consideration was made for individual differences there still remained a clearly recognized type; a type developed under an environment, narrow and unprogressive for many, many generations.

Later in the afternoon as she sat on the school porch waiting for Bob to drive her to the Phillips', she began planning a way to interest her college friends in the mountain work. They were all broadly scattered over the North, and though now engrossed with society they were fine girls, and would be glad to interest themselves in the splendid charity. A house party would introduce the subject first-hand to them. She would confide her scheme to Bobby Smalta, and let him select the men. Her mother would be delighted

with the gayety at the châlet. The mountain people would make their own appeal.

She hastened to the gate as Bob drove up.

"Oh, I'm full of the grandest scheme," she exclaimed as she took her seat, and with growing enthusiasm detailed the house party. "Of course I shan't carry it into effect until I have thoroughly acquainted myself with the situation. But I believe I am beginning to see a little into things. You must give me the light of your experience, and then tell me all you have gleaned from history, if there is any written."

The man looked for a moment searchingly into the face beside him, and then began to sketch the outlines of the mountain life. His love for the scenes and people of his childhood flashed emotion into the squalid pictures. The girl's mind was gripped by a deeper interest that seemed to grow by every story of weakness and suffering that she listened to.

How unequal I feel even to attempting to solve this tremendous problem, because I not only know my ignorance of these conditions, but of the past out of which they sprang. If I were only in touch with it as you are!"

"Well, let's begin at the time when the brotherhood of adventure and fortune came over from England."

"You mean the Anglo-Saxon, of course."

"Certainly," he nodded; "those whose grants lay in the mountains from Virginia to Georgia braved the dangers of the wilds, not dreaming that civilization

and prosperity would finally be for the valleys and plains alone."

"Yes, but when they saw the trend of progress, why didn't they follow it to the lower country?"

"The more progressive ones did. The less ambitious remained in the mountain fastnesses," and for a moment he was silent and then resumed bitterly, "and to each succeeding generation thereafter the outside world became more distant. Ignorance and weakness followed, and the once sturdy race fell into indolence and degeneracy."

"But, Bob, look how superb your grandfather was. He was thrifty, and as brave as the Gray Eagle, only gentler. Why, the Judge told Grandpa his dignity and honesty stood out in that trial more wonderfully than anything he ever saw in his life. Oh, he was kingly, and looked exactly as a great king should look."

Bob's eyes softened as he listened. Who could have voiced so perfectly his memory of "Grandpap"? A lump rose in his throat as the picture swam before him of finding the old man at a table dragged up before the fire, his hand still clutching the pencil that had but recently scrawled

"My Will

"Course all I got is yourn, Bob, but givin' ye all of that hain't a'givin' ye all that was a'comin' to ye, because me and Hame hain't done ye right, but hit were Hame that helt me down on m'word when she were a'dyin'. I have done make up my mind to lay hit all bef——"

The pencil had fallen.

Bob swallowed hard.

The girl began seriously:

"I think you are too broad in your assertions. Surely you have not forgotten some of the splendid people we found on our trips through this section. Many of them waiting for opportunity to come their way. Look at the numbers that have coöperated with us. The striking thing to me is such dignity, amid such poverty. Laziness is the disease that we must fight and overcome."

"Ah, but you must remember, the so-called laziness of the men is handed down. In the early days the men hunted and fished, and were about the house not as drones, but protectors and providers. Something like the Indian warriors. They were very jealous of their dignity, very clannish, and defended honor or an injustice with their life. To be sure lawlessness grew out of this. I remember the day when I considered 'moonshinin' a perfectly honorable business. And those very qualities of distrust, shrewdness, and sensitiveness were the outcome of the clash of mountain lawlessness against a code from which we were too far removed to understand. Yet through all the increasing weakness of generations dignity still remains in its primal strength."

"Just what I thought and just what I said. It is a disease—degeneracy. Oh, if we only had the money to reach all these people!"

"At least we can try to begin 'treatment' on a few nearest to us."

"Yes, but think of the many who needs must be left untouched, sinking lower and lower with successive generations. Instead of my house party I've a great mind to go on a lecture-begging tour up North."

"Would you mind giving me an unexpurgated account of your grandfather's expressions should you suggest this idea in his hearing?"

They both laughed and decided to defer the suggestion.

It was late when they returned from this business ride. They stopped, however, for a visit to Miss Flemming. The good fortune of securing her from one of the big mountain schools made them anxious to keep her enthusiastic. The school had flourished beyond expectation. Its location favored the "lookin' in to see what was a'gwine on" of people going to and from the village.

Araminta gave especial attention to these guests. She made sure that not one left without acquiring bits of information. Her vigilance was untiring, while her skill as a diplomat was daily tested by the wary farmers she tolled into the classes of the young teacher of agriculture whom Bob had secured from the University.

The children worked enthusiastically. The practical beginning made them eager students, and, without realizing it, the grind of "readin', writin', and 'rithmetic" became the key to a line of interesting work.

Bob offered prizes in every department, hence rivalry added a bustle and stir, making a bee-hive a loafing place in comparison with the school.

Bob now took his lunch daily in the domestic science department. Sometimes Mr. Warner accompanied him, but Bob never failed.

It was Miss Polly who suggested the luncheons. She was much interested in the school, but more in the growing intimacy between Araminta and Bob.

One day neither of the gentlemen came to luncheon at twelve o'clock, and, to the surprise of Araminta and Miss Polly, Bob did not appear for the entire afternoon.

Miss Polly fidgeted the remaining school hours, after which she tied on her bonnet and waited outside the gate for Araminta. To her the day had been abominably drawn out, and she believed it had been longer to her young cousin.

"I wonder why Papa and Bob did not come over to lunch to-day?"

"Busy, I expect," she wisely replied.

"Are you too tired to go by the office, Araminta? I ought to see your father before the safe is closed."

"Yes, dear, I am really tired." She reëntered the main room of the cabin which was fragrant with the odor of clematis running over the tiny porch. "I'll have to sit in here out of the glare until the carriage comes. I'm absolutely fagged."

At that moment Bob swept up in his new machine:

"Want to take a spin and get some fresh air?"

"It is exactly what I need," exclaimed Araminta laughing. "Jump in, Cousin Polly."

And to her refusal, Bob added: "No, we are not going a step without you." She still demurred, "Why,

what business could we possibly have that you could not hear? Aren't you a partner too?"

"Get in quick, dear," Araminta drew her by the arm. "I want Bob to go by the Kites', so you can see the improvements; and I want to leave some little things for Jim Willie." She ran back into the house and returned with a bundle. "You see, he has less chance at school than any of the others and I like to take him a few 'goodies' when I get a chance."

Intoxication suddenly swept over Bob as she took her seat beside him. Her face, serious under the weight of her new work, was yet lighted up by the glow of success. Her spirits rose to merriment as the breeze swept away fatigue, and stimulated the rehearsal of the amusing side of the day's work.

Bob watched the play about her mouth, the steady glow of her eyes through the twinkle of fun. He admired anew the artistic hands, as with difficulty they held the paper covering the "goodies" for her protégé. His eyes grew gentler with each ripple of laughter interrupting her discourse. Suddenly she stopped:

"Where were you at lunch, sir?"

"I was at Granny Tank's."

"Haven't you had anything to eat?"

"Not a mouthful. Had to take that time to go to Witches Head. The messenger said, 'Come at once!' and I thought the old creature was sick. Guess what she wanted?"

"Heavens! I hope it was not something about me interfering with her clientele."

"It was strictly in regard to myself; in fact a gift

of a conjure bag to protect me from the widow Filpot, whom she heard was on 'my track'!"

He produced the conjure bag which Miss Polly started to throw away. Araminta caught it:

"Oh, no, Cousin Polly, not for worlds. She might ask to see it, and, if he couldn't produce it, it would break the old thing's heart. By the way, I must take her some broth to-night. The darkies will not go near her. Mother and I have to carry everything she gets from our house." She looked up at Bob in frank sympathy with his whimsical loyalty to a conjure bag, and handed it back to him. The knowledge and comradeship of years spoke in her glance. His eyes held hers intensely and briefly.

Araminta's gaze fell bewildered. Her thoughts rushed backward and forward. But at that moment the brood of Belinda Kite, on the look-out at a turn of the mountain road, rose with noisy cheer, and rushed towards the machine.

CHAPTER XX

THE lights of the châlet were twinkling out against the last ray of the evening afterglow as the party returned from Belinda Kite's. The Colonel stood on the veranda making impatient overtures to them. He was excited over new and rushing rumors of Craigmore de Layne, the grandson of Henri, comrade of his youth. For years the old gentleman had been troubled over the neglect of the Willows estate. He had written plainly to Craigmore on the subject, three years ago, when the burning of the mansion house had necessitated the storing of its priceless furnishings in the insecure cottage of the overseer.

Two years later, Craigmore, forced to return to America through financial distress, managed, while in New York, to negotiate a sale of the brick of the old ruin with an antique fancier for the sum of eight thousand dollars. Neither the Colonel nor Athens recovered from this financiering. After that Craigmore was considered to have the ability to look after his own affairs.

Since then he had taken things most actively in hand. He had transformed the plantation into a breeding farm and training course. The success of this venture only served to give prominence to his

dissipations, until his rapidly failing health won the community to forgiveness.

Suddenly Athens was again stirred by him. Big bill posters announced the entire estate to be sold at auction the following week.

The Colonel was at fever heat.

"Hurry up, all of you! Supper's ready, or ought to be." To Bob's suggestion of returning to the hotel, he flashed out:

"Not a bit of it, sir. I especially want your aid in a delicate and difficult matter. Make them have supper, Araminta. Sit down, Bob; it is enough to bring tears out of rocks to note the wreck that degenerate boy has wrought." The soft flesh on his lower jaws shook in indignant emphasis. "However, no amount of unhappiness on my part can restore matters. I want you to secure for me, without my appearing in the transaction, mind you, some of the pictures, particularly two old French prints with which I have the closest association. I would rather they were acquired at private sale, and at once, before the auction; though perhaps the idiot who purchased the brick may have secured the prints also."

The subject of prints was continued at supper. Every expression from the old man was the fear of their loss, or a new scheme for acquiring them.

Bob finally saved the family from nervous exhaustion by a guarantee to deliver them into his hands.

"Thank heaven," exclaimed Miss Polly, leaving the table, "the discussion of prints is at an end!"

Araminta drew Bob into the library:

"Don't you think, with the moon as bright as day, we could walk over to Granny Tank's and take this broth?" She looked up into his face and a trembling possessed her.

He followed as she led the way to the little forest path.

At the sound of footsteps the charm of night sounds that filled the forest was suddenly hushed, and in place of myriads of blended, cheerful voices, there was the intense strain of the silence of arrested life.

The man stood still and lifted his face to the wind and the stars.

Suddenly, out of the stillness, the voice of a bird rose in a long note.

"Oh!" breathed the girl, "wasn't that a relief? What is it?"

"Just a mocking bird calling to its mate."

In the woods other bird notes now answered, and one by one the little things of the forest joined in the harmony until the symphony of the summer night was again full.

They were now in sight of Witches Head. The little cabin, though apparently the same, had taken on an additional room, which gave an air of comfort. A cat wailed on the outside of the rock chimney, and a girl sat under the black gum tree, leaning against its ancient trunk.

"She hain't gone to bed." The girl saw them pause. She's a'settin' afore the fire a'dippin."

"Yes, I be," growled the crone, "and whut's more I expect to set and dip tell I gits good and ready to

stop too. I hain't a'gwine to let no young heifer tell me when I got to go to bed."

Bob struck a match to the candle on the mantel shelf.

"Why do you sit in the dark, Granny," he asked cheerily.

At sight of him her mood changed to a surly pleasantness, which gradually, as the broth soothed her, developed into a kind of civility. With a loud ahem! she finished the soup and set the vessel on the hearth. She leaned over and peered at the moon through the door.

"Moon's wanin', hain't hit?"

"Not much," replied Bob. "It is only what is called a little gibbous."

"I hain't never heerd tell of that. I jist knows trouble starts to workin' soon as the moon starts to wane, 'tain't no time to be a'love-mixin', I tell ye. Ye got to fight when ye does things on the wane."

"We have to do that in everything anyway, Granny." Araminta picked up the bowl. "Don't you want some more broth?"

"Thar's a heap of fokes that hain't got no more sense than ye've got." She ignored the question of broth. "Hit's dangous to conjur speerits on the wane; if eny of 'em is got a mind to come of therse'f, I'll tell ye whut they says, and I'll ax 'em not to pester ye none on the wane."

Her conversation trailed off into stupid irrelevancies. She was evidently tired and sleepy, and was out

of bed simply to plague her attendant. Her guests rose to go.

"We'll come again some time."

She started violently, as though in the midst of a dream.

"Ye hain't a'gwine to marry this year, young 'ooman." And she fastened her eyes unpleasantly on Araminta. Then, coming more to herself, she continued mildly:

"But ye mout some time, come spring, if somebody don't steal ye man from ye."

Araminta laughed.

"Not this spring nor next, Granny. I have no ambition to change my present condition."

"That's caze everything's gwine on smooth for ye; jist wait tell somebody sots ther eye on ye man."

"My man? I haven't any."

"I'll be bound ye've got a good dozen of 'em; why, hit'll sca'ce come spring afore ye air j'ined good and tight to one of 'em, too."

"I hope it will be the right one, Granny."

As they walked back along the moonlit path the trifling prophecies of the old crone began to fasten on the man's mind. It started a chain of thoughts that hastened the development of emotions now possessing him. He wondered as he watched the slender figure wandering slowly before him, how it was that he knew so little of the intervening years of her maturer life. She had told him of Julie's career up to two years ago, had lightly touched upon her own travels, but of herself he knew nothing, save the recent unfolding of a

womanhood that, deepening daily, seemed to him at this moment to have ripened into divinity. Strange that they should have talked so much about Julie, when Araminta's life was one of vital interest to him. He could not conceive in a rapid review of the past, when this splendid comrade was not uppermost. From her childish peace-making efforts between Julie and himself, to the present tireless work among the lowly, she must ever have been the ideal of his life.

He was scarcely conscious of the laughing dissertation she was giving on Granny Tank, but fully alive to the intonation of her voice, so soft and vibrant.

He noted afresh the high carriage of her head, the brown-reddish hair fastened in a simple coil upon its crown. Every now and then she glanced back, almost overpowering him with a new sense of her beauty, which in the half light looked chiseled. Who were her suitors? Of course, she had scores of them. The doting old hag was more astute than he. Yet she could not be seriously interested. Did she not tell him on their first meeting of her determination to be a spinster like Miss Polly, and had she not expressed her disgust for love-sick swains? Smilingly he remembered promising never to join the ranks of her suitors.

They were almost at the châlet and could see the lights through the thicket of hawthorns they were passing. He would leave her at the gate. It was not safe to trust himself to-night. He might blurt out something and upset the entire scheme of his life.

"Look here, Bob; can't you answer a single question?" She lightly touched the hand he put out to protect her from the jutting branches of the hawthorn.

Instantly at the warm contact with her flesh, his arms closed in wild tenderness about her, and for one instant his lips rested softly, deliriously upon hers. As quickly he yielded to her struggles and released her.

Bewildered and astonished, she looked at him. She was frightened as his soul bare of conventions awaited her judgment; more frightened still at the wild beating of her own heart. She covered her eyes for a moment, then turned and fled.

He followed her to the gate in a delirium, watched her enter the house, then turned and continued his way.

The neighing of his horse partially recalled him, but not sufficiently to return. He was halfway down the mountain before his brain recovered any degree of calmness.

"What a fool I have been! Left my horse neighing out there, too." Hastily he turned. The horse had been stabled and the châlet was in darkness.

"Unmitigated idiot that I am to lose every vestige of sense I ever had."

He started for the châlet stable, changed his mind and walked again towards the village.

"Idiot! Idiot!" Yet even as his judgment rebuked him, the recollection of her lips against his sent a flame through him that fired his spirit to recklessness, almost to madness. He was glad he had done it; glad

to have lived through such a moment of ecstasy. It was worth a man's life, and cheap at that.

Quite suddenly the duller side of life chilled his fervor. The horse! What was he to say about it? It would be the first question asked by Mr. Warner in the morning. Though he sought in every corner of his brain, no credible explanation presented itself, and he determined boldly to make a clean breast of it to his partner.

In such brave exaltation he reached his room.

With the flashing on of the light, his eyes fell first on the picture in the frame. But the violet eyes of Araminta beneath the straight-lined brows shut out all other faces.

CHAPTER XXI

I SENT your horse to the stable, Mason," casually remarked Mr. Warner next morning as his junior partner walked into his private office.

The younger man reddened and stammered painfully between the indecision of an excuse and a "clean breast." Robert Warner's eyes twinkled, though his face was grave, and he started to say something by way of relieving the situation when Bob took a deep breath and began:

"Mr. Warner, I——"

The stenographer, answering a mistaken call, entered. Mr. Mason threw a telegram on his partner's desk and walked away. Robert Warner's suspicions were confirmed by the young man's constraint and confusion. It was on his tongue to say: "For Heaven's sake, Bob, take the girl, with my blessing." But he feared he would do harm by blurting out his sanction prematurely. Let the young people stumble through their own love affairs, was his philosophy. The romance between his young partner and his daughter was no secret in the family, except from his father. Mr. Warner's lips shaped for a long, low whistle as he thought of the rock of the old Colonel's aristocratic prejudices. "I'd like to give Bob the tip to sit tight, and let Araminta hold her own against her grand-

father, but time enough for this later, when Bob and Araminta have published their news."

As the day progressed Bob found himself unable to attend to the smallest matters.

His one idea was to see Araminta alone! Never could he face her without the plea of his love ready to stand for his act. This would be impossible in the presence of a family audience, hence he must see her before evening. Privacy at the school would be difficult, but it could be managed with more ease there than at the châlet. Perhaps it would be better to wait until dear Miss Polly's little phaëton climbed homeward about noon.

For the first time in his life he shifted all the work on his senior and, closing the door of his private office, watched for the passing of the phaëton. The telephone rang. He did not answer it until he was twice called, and then he was thrown into a panic by Colonel Warner announcing that the date of the de Layne sale was changed for this week. They would have to leave the next day. There was no way of evading the determined old man. He had promised to go, and he must. Neither was there time to be lost. It was past noon. He must see Araminta in spite of Miss Polly's presence. Mr. Warner called him as he passed out, but he pretended not to hear. On the street he was constantly stopped, but the plea of urgent business made a way of escape.

At the school he glanced about and missed Miss Polly's conveyance. Luck! He would see her alone, after all.

A little urchin passed in the yard.

"Is—a—Miss Warner inside?"

"She's done gone."

"Gone where?"

"I dunno."

A big girl interfered.

"Yes, ye do; her and Miss Polly went sumwher's, and they're a'gwine home. They hain't a'comin' back here no more to-day."

He went to the hotel to call the châlet over the telephone. She was not there.

There was nothing to do but to go back to the office and wait until he could find out where Araminta had gone. Schemes came and went in his mind, but the one determination pounded in all his thoughts, to see Araminta. All the resourcefulness that he depended upon in business had deserted him. He felt that he had blundered, but blundered into a great happiness. Just five minutes with her alone, she would understand —he would make her; for were not their lives filled with schemes and ideals they had created together, the success of which depended on their close fellowship—a fellowship that had forged a bond that was unbreakable? She belonged to him and he would have her!

He went down to the booth in the hotel office and telephoned to Mrs. Warner, but she could give no information. He returned to his room, threw away an unlighted cigar and paced the floor steadily for half an hour, without a glimmer of inspiration.

Mechanically he strode back to the office. It was

impossible to attend to business, he could not even follow Mr. Warner's arguments, and was on the point of blurting out a hundred times that he could think of nothing, do nothing, until he knew his fate at Araminta's hands.

At last the long day drew to its close.

"Going up with me, Bob?"

"Why, thank you, Mr. Warner; I will come up a little later! The Colonel telephoned we would have to leave to-morrow for the sale, and as I have some things to do before I go——"

"Oh, pshaw! what's the matter with you? I'll not go a step without you."

There was no alternative.

They cantered along, talking over their affairs As they neared the sight of the châlet, Bob became panic-stricken. In all the trials and tribulations of his life, it was his first experience of fear.

The simple faith of Miss Polly's teaching rose to his lips, and he invoked the most fervent prayer of his life to see the girl alone, if but a moment before the family gathering at supper. He only asked for time to tell her of his love simply, without excuse for his act; he would not even ask a return at this time, only assure her that his heart without his volition lay at her feet.

At the top of the mountain, at the bend of the road that leads direct to the châlet, Araminta appeared.

She seemed in search of something. Every now and again her white-frocked figure bent forward investigatingly.

Bob whipped up and dismounted. He had forgotten Mr. Warner.

"Give me your bridle; I'll lead your horse in," and Robert Warner passed them smilingly.

At sight of the masterful figure of her lover, Araminta's face crimsoned. His own was bloodless as he paused to read his sentence in her face. Her first glance fell in confusion, but when she lifted her eyes to meet his compelling gaze the light of forgiveness was in them, timid but unwavering.

"Araminta, I love you." His voice was tense and scarcely above a whisper.

Miss Polly stood striking her cane on the ground.

"Do come on; I told you the broach would be ground to powder, even if you lost it out here. Help me please, Bob; a gouty foot is not comfortable under the best conditions." She took his arm and, hobbling painfully, continued: "I want you and Joseph to protect any very personal effects of poor Mamie's; I will reimburse you. And do find out all you can about Julie; I am afraid she must be in deep distress. Don't fail, for I——"

The old Colonel left the porch and also walked out to meet him.

"Bob, my boy, I've just had a long-distance from Athens, and the sale begins to-morrow. I cannot understand such a mix-up, but that is the 'last word.' So you see we cannot possibly go by automobile in the morning, as we had planned; we must leave on the nine-forty to-night. Come on; we have to eat in haste, you know."

"All right, sir; I'm as good as my word." But he looked at Araminta, not at the Colonel, and their eyes met briefly.

"Very well, sir; come, let's eat and be off."

CHAPTER XXII

IT was well they had taken the nine-forty train the previous night, for before that hour next morning the road to the "Willows" was choked with automobiles, carriages, wagons, creeping vehicles, whose owners had been ordered by foresighted bidders to remove their purchases.

Colonel Warner was childish in his excitement, and the weakness of years was telling on him.

"Watch for the prints, Bob; they are not very large, remember, but very dear to me. Don't forget they are framed in black ebony, about half a foot one way and a quarter the other way. They are inlaid with a lighter wood, and hung with a little ring at the top."

"What are the subjects of them, Colonel?"

Bob repeated the question a time or two. Finally with boyish shyness, the old gentleman said shamefacedly:

"Le Bain was one, and La Toilette was the other."

Bob smiled and gave attention to the landscape. The naughty little titles gave a peep far back into his companion's eighty years.

"They were purchased by my foster brother, Robert Noy. It is the association," he explained, "a part of our early visit to the Continent as boys—you understand."

But the confusion up the driveway at the "Willows" diverted further apology. The site of the old mansion was an ugly scar on the landscape. The location, robbed even of the dignity of its ruins, was marked only by an irregular hole in the ground, half filled with water. The little office in the yard was also leveled by the sale of brick.

"Drive quick, Jim," commanded the Colonel, as the chauffeur slowed down in the congregation of other machines. "Get out of this quick; go around by the stables."

But the sight there was no less depressing. The once spacious barns, instead of presenting an easy good fellowship of the darkies at their several duties, swarmed with horsemen. "Scrubs" and thoroughbreds were tied alike on the outside of the fences, hitching racks, or any nail or hook strong enough to hold. The cows were herded under the trees; Jersey, Holstein and mixed breed lowed wailingly into each other's faces, calling to their calves that answered from a scampering distance.

Both men covered their ears.

"Get out of this."

"Have to skirt around by the garden; it's blocked here."

The chauffeur struggled, backing over irregular ground where farming implements lay spread everywhere for exhibition. Some were new, the bright red and blue paint here and there marking the lateness of their design and purchase. Others were old and broken and, honestly exposing their weakness in the

sunlight, asked no better future than the dump pile; or, tied together in some shiftless way, to be dragged behind the uncertain heels of a negro's mule.

The car bumped along by the garden, up one little knoll, down another, until it faced straight in the direction of the overseer's cottage. The crowd about the fence was thick. The gentlemen alighted and elbowed their way inside the enclosure, where a still more closely packed mass pushed about the auctioneer. He stood first in one place and then another among the household furniture strewn in jumbled confusion over the lawn.

A kitchen cabinet of modern design, roughly abused, and marked with dirt and grease stood neighbors with an antique cabinet with leaded panes and spindle legs. The auctioneer with difficulty found footing among the battered cooking utensils on the kitchen table. At his back was the family sideboard, mutely endeavoring to maintain its standard of elegance even amid the embarrassing surroundings. Farther along behind other furniture, but still on the same side of the house, pictures were hung for inspection. They were nailed promiscuously on the outside weather boarding of the dwelling.

"Who'll start this fine kitchen cabinet?" rang the rasping tones of the auctioneer. "Course it's new, man; just a little knocked up and dirty from carelessness. Can't expect a bachelor to run a kitchen or manage a cook. What'll yer give? I'm bid two dollars—tut, tut—a little soap and water will make it like new—five—six—gimme seven, gimme seven—

gimme seven—seven—gimme eight, gimme eight—all done?" He paused. "Surely, ladies, you all know the cost of a handsome kitchen cabinet—gimme eight —well, gimme twenty-five—thank you—seven twenty-five. I'm bid seven twenty-five—gimme fifty, gimme fifty—all done? Gimme fifty—all done? Seven twenty-five once, seven twenty-five twice, seven twenty-five three times, and sold to the lady with the green feather for seven twenty-five. Yonder she is, right there.

"Now, here's a high-boy, friend—judging from its spindle legs and the number of drawers it contains, it must be the highest boy in the world."

Some laughed, some absorbed in the technique of bidding scoffed; others, sympathetic, sighed.

"What'd you say you'd start it for?—Five dollars? No, sir, I wouldn't lower such a piece of antique as—ten? Well, we'll let her start at ten. Ten—I'm bid fifteen—who'll gimme twenty?" he continued breathlessly, praising his wares and running up the price. "Gimme five, gimme five——"

"Get past here, Bob," half groaned Colonel Warner. "Help me on to one of those chairs in front and you go back and look through those pictures."

"May I trouble you to let me pass?" was Bob's continuous refrain as he half lifted his companion to one of the chairs in the jumble of furniture in the yard for sale. The front of the overseer's dwelling was lined on the outside with mirrors. Their bases upon the ground, they leaned against the outside of the house in all manner of attitudes. Mahogany and gilt

frames, oval mirrors and pier glasses crowded each other among the vines. They reflected the miserable confusion of library furniture, drawing-room rosewood with its dainty Napoleonic design, couches of the same period, also tester beds swung with ancient and dusty damask. Books in many piles threatened to tumble on priceless bric-a-brac, made indistinguishable by dust from the pressed glass rubbing elbows with it. Mattresses, pillows, quilts, eiderdown with silk coverings, were hung or crumpled against old-fashioned pieced quilts. Handsome blankets, sheets, pillow cases and towels, some regal in embroidery and texture, others common, dingy, suggestive of disease; faded velvet carpets, Persians rugs, cheap ingrains, all massed and mingled together.

Colonel Warner sank into one of the heavy tufted chairs. He was pale, trembling and faint.

Mr. Mason rushed to the well in the rear; finding no dipper, he hastily sought a vessel in which to carry a cooling draught to the old man. He stumbled upon a pine table in a back porch room, covered with old pewter, silver and Sheffield plate. Hall marks and crests were in evidence on each gem of a piece. Bob took one of the silver goblets; there was no one from whom to seek permission. Save himself and his companion, every person, whether white, black, high or low, followed the voice of the auctioneer. As he hastened back, turning the corner of the house, he beheld a tall, emaciated, but handsome daredevil of a fellow leaning over and excitedly talking to Colonel

Warner. Nearer sight revealed that the emotion was due to stimulants.

"Think of it, Colonel, that high-boy, a piece of furniture used by my grandfather, your friend, going for forty dollars! In New York it would bring two hundred. Oh, if I could just ship this priceless treasure up there; but I haven't the money nor the strength. Oh, Colonel, look at me! doomed by tuberculosis. I have only a short time to live; for God's sake go and rescue the high-boy!"

"What shall I give you for it, Craigmore?" huskily asked his victim.

"A hundred at least, Colonel."

"Bid it in, Bob."

Laying his head back against the soft-cushioned chair, even amid the noise and glare, the old man dozed off from exhaustion. When he opened his eyes, Mr. Mason informed him the prints were nowhere to be found.

"Have you looked through the house?"

"Everywhere, save in one room, which seems to be closed for privacy."

"Nonsense." He pointed to little personal gifts on the tables and ground, to crops and riding whips, coach whips stuck into umbrella stands on the small porch, to the green satin jockey coat and cap, and other racing paraphernalia hanging in the hall on a common hat hanger nailed to the plastered wall. "Nothing is private. Merciful Lord! Poor Henri! Go, my son, go and search that room and if they are not there, ask

that drunken creature. Purchase them at his own price and let's be off."

Bob entered the hall and turned the knob of the closed door. He opened it but narrowly at first, until he perceived it swept of furnishings, save a bachelor's wardrobe and steamer trunks. Both were open—half packed or unpacked, displaying clothes of all descriptions vulgarly flaring or conservatively plain; shirts, silk socks, worn and new; hats and gloves scattered in all directions. Mr. Mason would have withdrawn with this glimpse of the one effort at privacy had not the two prints on the wall attracted him. He entered to make sure.

"Oh," sounded a woman's voice from the far side; "who are you, and what are you doing in here?"

"I beg your pardon."

But something in the quality of the voice drew his eyes in the direction of the speaker.

On a low, old-fashioned stool crouched a small figure. The light coming in between the slats of the window blinds striped bright places across the lower part of her body, and on her black, glossy hair whenever she threw herself forward.

"My name is Bob Mason, and I came at the request of Colonel Warner——"

"Bob!" and Julie raised both hands in supplication and brought them quickly to her face, covering it.

"Julie!" He rushed across the room and fell on one knee, in order to get near the bowed figure. "My poor little Julie—that you should be a part of this horrible scene!"

Her eyes were dry and burned feverishly. Only moans that seemed to come from depths impossible to her tiny frame sounded in the silent room.

"Oh, to die at this moment," she groaned.

"Dear Julie, do not feel so wretched. You have many who love you. You must get away from here."

"Where?" she piteously questioned, wringing her hands.

"To the châlet. The Colonel is out here! Miss Polly, Araminta, all of them, want you—are waiting to welcome you."

"Oh, Bob"—she grasped the hand held out in gesticulation and, closing it within her tiny ones, pressed it against her forehead—"you are——"

"What are you doing in here?" Craigmore stood in the middle of the floor.

His features, dissipated and emaciated, looked demoniacal. He had seen Bob in attendance on Colonel Warner, and supposing him to be a hanger-on of some kind, burst into a fury of oaths.

"For God's sake, Craigmore! This is Mr. Mason of Warner, Mason & Co.," and she fell into tearless sobs.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mr. Mason." His obsequiousness was disgustingly genuine. "I was not aware who you were. My sister has so often spoken of you that I should intuitively have——"

"In the name of mercy, Craigmore!" pleaded the girl.

"I will arrange with the Colonel, Julie, and return."

Bob left the room without deigning a look at her brother.

Craigmore took one of the several bottles behind the wardrobe trunk and after turning it to his lips, exclaimed:

"You marry that man, do you hear? No use to be whimpering and pining after that pauper Jean. If he has not already been killed in the war by this time, he will before it is over."

"Why, Craigmore, you said I was not even to receive attentions from an American."

"That was before our poor France became involved in war, before this damned tuberculosis seized me. Now we've got to take the best we can get. If you ever expect to see French shores again, it will be through the pocket of a rich husband." He walked across the room and leaning close to the top of her head whispered in sepulchral voice, "Marry Mason. He's got more of it than any of them around here."

Bob knocked on the half open door. Immediately it was thrown open with a royal sweep.

"Walk in, Mr. Mason, my sister was just telling me that——"

"Come on, Julie, the Colonel is waiting."

The girl hastily gathered up a few things she had removed from a foreign handpiece in the corner, and half fastened on her hat, while Bob negotiated and acquired the prints at an extortionate price.

"Don't leave, Mr. Mason; come and bid on some of this stuff out here, why——"

"Hurry, Bob." The distracted girl partially get-

ting her veil down, grasped and pushed the arm of her deliverer. "Hurry!" They made their way through the confusion, scarce stopping for a salutation from the old gentleman. Craigmore followed, pointing out bargains.

"Forty—gimme fifty—gimme fifty—won't somebody gimme forty-five, then? Gimme forty-five—gimme forty-five——. Fifty, I thought so—gimme fifty-five—Ladies and gentlemen, you all don't seem to recollect that this is not one of the plebeian kind of beds. Remember George Washington, and Gen'al Lay'fett, and the King of France have slept in this bed. They all slept together in it, too, I expect—it's big enough for six of them. Fifty, who'll gimme fifty-five, who'll make it fifty-five?——"

"Oh, Colonel, don't let the bridal bed of your old friend be sacrificed at fifty dollars. Please, Colonel, come to the rescue."

"Run it up ten dollars, Bob, and bid it in."

Julie pulled the small piece of veil closer over her face, and pushed Bob forward:

"Let it alone, oh, let it alone and get me out!"

As the machine door slammed, Craigmore sprang on the running board.

"Stop a minute," he laid a hand on the chauffeur, who had started the engine. "Colonel, all of my grandfather's silver, Sheffield plate, and pewter are back there, exposed to plebeian and negro purchasers! Oh, save it! You can have it all for a thousand dollars. Buy it, please, at least until I can purchase it back for my little sister here."

"I'll take it, Craigmore. Start on, Jim."

"No, wait." Again he detained the chauffeur, and ordered a servant near by "to get everything in that room and tie it up in a cloth and bring it here."

"Be quick about it," Bob indignantly urged.

"My poor sister; remember she is the main beneficiary of this sale; it is for her sake that I have suffered this——"

"Gimme fifteen—gimme fifteen—don't let that fine old——"

Craigmore stepped off the running board, and the silver was dumped in the bottom of the car.

"Drive fast, drive fast, do you hear?"

The machine started dangerously down the irregular declivity.

"Oh, Colonel, don't go—I——"

Julie's head fell on Bob's shoulder. For a moment both gentlemen thought she had fainted, but she answered their anxiety:

"I'm all right. Just let me alone for a moment."

Bob's pity was so aroused that he would fain have put a comforting arm about his little friend and thought nothing of the position, had not the Colonel's attention become engrossed with the situation. He kept his eyes straight in front for the most part save for indignant glances to see if her position had changed. Each time he reviewed the tableau his anger increased.

"Where are those prints, Bob?" he finally demanded.

"On the front seat, Colonel; you remember they were moved to give place to the silver."

"Get them, sir, and hold them."

Julie raised her head for Bob to procure the prints, and was about to return to her former position, when the elder escort suggested:

"If your head must lie on some shoulder, it is better taste that you choose that of an older man."

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was late nightfall when Mr. Mason reached Haberwood with his two responsibilities. The tension between the old man and the young people grew greater with each mile.

To Bob the trip had been one of tragic pity, and at the same time, on account of the Colonel's attitude, one of keen amusement.

The girl touchingly depended on Bob; childishly clung to him, and became restless when the old man's subterfuge detained him at any length.

Bob regarded her as the little dethroned self-crowned queen, and would have held the hand that wanted to snuggle within his own, had not a pair of gray eyes glowered on them with the conventions of generations.

At the station at Haberwood he bodily lifted the old gentleman from the high step of the Pullman, and turned to Julie whose arms were already extended, when Colonel Warner detained him and pushed Mr. Robert Warner forward.

"Assist Julie!"

The twinkle in Mason's eye found an answer in Robert Warner's, who genially tried to lighten the atmosphere.

"Whew! Julie's little, but she's heavy. Coming up with us, Bob?"

"Not to-night." He waved and started off.

"Oh, Bob, please come"; Julie looked like a child.

"Can't possibly to-night."

"Stop! don't go before you tell me when I am to see you. Not before to-morrow night? Horrors!" She seemed forgetful of the others.

The situation, already clear to Robert Warner, became humorously so when his father laid a heavy hand on his arm and angrily whispered:

"It's been going on ever since they met. Disgraceful!"

The old man was angry and Julie was distrait, hence the drive up the mountain was made almost in silence. There was an occasional "yes and no" from Julie in reply to Robert Warner's conversation, but the older man made no effort.

Julie received a warm welcome at the châlet. After Araminta and Miss Polly had caressed and petted her, they put the exhausted girl to bed. Then the family assembled in the library to hear about the finding of her and the result of the sale.

The atmosphere was icy. Colonel Warner's displeasure made itself felt in the family circle.

"Where did you find her, Father, and how long has she been in America?" excitedly questioned Mrs. Warner, disregarding his menacing attitude.

"Mr. Mason found her in some off room at the sale." He mopped his forehead to emphasize the pause. "And though I feel deeply her deplorable

helplessness, I do not approve of nor understand the attitude she and Mason have adopted to each other."

Miss Polly's foot began to pat the floor.

"His first love!" flashed across Araminta.

"She threw herself on his shoulder without respect for my presence or regard for the public. What previous encouragement he gave for this conduct, for he was quite a while from me—I do not know. But this I do know, that even had they been married, it would have been bad taste; had they been engaged, it would have been unseemly; but as neither of these conditions are supposed to exist, it was disgraceful!"

"I fail to see why Bob should be blamed for the fault of Julie," snapped Miss Polly.

"I do not expect you to see anything very clearly that relates to your protégé. It is our mistake that we have become his social sponsers."

Robert Warner defended: "Father, Bob Mason is the finest man I ever knew."

Miss Polly was too angry for speech.

"At all events," continued the old gentleman, "it behooves us to give him a few lessons in decorum, that despite his fine qualities are the birthright only of gentlemen."

"Should be their birthright, but is not!" Miss Polly's face was purple splotched. "I can recall some very impeachable spots in your own aristocratic life." She walked to the center of the room, her wide hoop skirts making various bulges and contractions as she forced her way between the furniture. "I tell you, Joseph," she fastened her eyes within his, while the

tensity of anger modulated her voice, "it is a poor bird that befouls its own nest; Bob Mason has our blood in his veins!"

"Polly, you are in your dotage," he thundered.

"Can any of you deny the likeness to my brother's portrait? even the cow-lick on the wrong side?"

"Polly," his anger was changed to alarm, "I have told you a thousand times that hundreds of men have the same thing. You have concentrated your mind on this likeness so long that it has developed into a form of mania."

"Mania didn't put the mole like my brother's behind his ear, mania didn't fashion the shape of his nose. I tell you he is my brother's grandson! Your arguments are wasted; I have felt this to the certainty of knowledge ever since the first lesson I taught him out under that old tree yonder. But leave all that out, cast it aside; his noble nature places him alone, and puts him far above the frost line of race bigots."

"To think," he answered furiously, "that all this feeling should be awakened by the impossible parentage of old Ebenezer Mason's grandson."

"By Ebenezer's grand nephew, his sister's grandson," she interrupted.

"Polly, you bribed old Mrs. Mason to say Minnie left a child."

"She said it because I cornered her, and caught her in a rambling evasion, though," she said sadly, "I was never able to make her say how old Minnie's son was when he died. If she hadn't passed away so soon afterwards, I was going to openly accuse her of rob-

bing me of Bob on account of her dependence on him."

"Accuse her!" he laughed gratingly. "Why if she had suspected your imbecility, she would have thrust him on you if she'd had to declare war."

"Joseph, I——"

"I beseech you to desist and let this topic close forever, with, however, this word." He turned to his son. "Mason must know, you understand, Robert, he must be made to know that his social position here does not admit him to matrimonial pretensions. Julie should be protected against herself."

"Julie protected! It would be the best day's work she, or any other girl, ever did for herself."

"Merciful God!" and the Colonel hastened from the room.

Miss Polly sank in a chair exhausted. She stole a look in Araminta's direction to see the effect of her grandfather's tirade. But the girl was gone.

Araminta slipped away to her room when the abuse of Bob became unbearable. She desired to avoid discussing him in a family squabble. It was absurd for her grandfather to measure modern conduct by standards of the last century, particularly Julie's foreign code. Bob Mason was a man whose principles were above criticism. She knew his nature as she knew her own. Twice he had laid bare his heart before her —told her that he loved her, and she believed him. Her grandfather was too imperious; there was some misconception; judgment must be suspended until Bob appeared to speak for himself.

In the meantime she would write a business letter, and read some new school literature that had just come.

"Parker, Blade and Company," she began, but stopped to put in a new pen.

"Why didn't Bob come up with Papa to-night? He said when he left last night that we might expect him after the train. Wonder why he didn't? why he didn't telephone and tell me? But of course, Julie's presence upset him as it has us."

She bit the end of her pen, and began to wonder exactly what had happened to embarrass him. She would have given anything for the cold recital of facts. Bob had always liked Julie; his preference for Julie was the sorrow of her childhood. That preference was, however, before he had developed into the great serious man he was. Julie's flippancy could never fill his life now; and yet, his thoughts had always had a serious turn, even as Julie's had always been frivolous.

Could it be that the love of his childhood, dormant all these years, had burst forth at meeting Julie? That her piteous distress, and memories of his boyish infatuation had opened the way for the "little queen" imperiously to dash upon her throne? Undoubtedly this might be true, but was it? What of her own relations to him, was it comradeship or love? Was the feeling that had grown up between them only the result of propinquity?

She breathed deeply as she surrendered her soul to phantoms light as air, yet powerful to convince her

that she must be at least prepared to find Bob faithful to his first love.

Forgotten moments of childish pain started to new life. This was the same old Julie come back across her path, piquant and gay, full of a thousand whims that a serious man like Bob loves without understanding. Her dark, flashing, slight beauty gave her the charm of a finely cut jewel. Araminta had never made any pretense of comprehending the devious paths of Julie's nature, but she instinctively feared the subtleties and selfish force of will that she felt lay behind her appealing or imperious moods.

She left the desk and walked to the window. She strained her eyes to recognize objects within range, and smiled at the grotesque shapes the night shadows made. She looked in the direction of the hawthorn thicket; vividly the scene with Bob stood out. Again she covered her eyes to shut out the crowding visions.

"There must be some mistake! What could it mean?"

At all events she would prepare to face the situation. If he preferred Julie, that was the end of it. There would be no embarrassing complications. She would ignore and forget what he probably already regretted. She laughed cheerlessly.

Why, indeed, had she taken this man more literally than scores of others who had touched her life? Though she acknowledged him their superior, still he was human, a man after all.

She heard Miss Polly's foot on the stairs. Hastily she rushed towards the light and turned it out. She

leaned a few moments out of the window in the darkness and then went to bed but not to sleep.

If she could only drop out of existence long enough to master the new conditions. This was impossible. Of course, school work had to go on, it mattered not what Bob had done, or the motives actuating him. She must force herself into shape to meet the requirements.

All sorts of complications rose before her, and early dawn found her still going around the circle of her argument, preaching down her heart with maxims of pride and fortifying herself with the lately discarded weapons of conventionality.

Julie rested soundly for the first time in weeks, for the first time in months the horror of uncertainty left her. A new vista opened which led to a definite end —marriage. The conversation concerning Bob she had overheard leaning from the railing in the hall above added to her sense of security. To know that he was already considered her suitor was half the battle. She could hardly wait to see him. Her quick emotions sped through the season of courtship. Oh, if they were already married and on their way to France with his wealth at her disposal! Her heart sang at the thought of playing "Lady Bountiful" to her relatives in that distressed land, to friends, and to Jean.

This would not mean that she would marry Bob coldly, without feeling. She would give him what he inspired, the highest and best in her, but not romance; that belonged to Jean. He held the first glow of her heart, but it should be kept away, far away, from her

new life. With every conscious breath she would be faithful to Bob. To be sure she would help Jean along with the others hopelessly bereft. She longed to begin, to give, give. She was grateful that there was nothing apparently to retard her plans. The family expected Bob to offer himself. Evidently they remembered his boyish adoration of her. With pleasure and a degree of triumph she recalled his farewell in the Cave, the feverish anguish of his proud lips covering her little hand. The thought of it lulled her into deeper security, and at last into slumber.

CHAPTER XXIV

BREAKFAST at the châlet had gradually lost its traditional atmosphere of leisure and sociability, and more and more became a perfunctory preface to the business day. Promptness and haste were the distinguishing characters of the hour. But on this particular morning as the family gathered, each seemed to be unusually preoccupied, either with the coming events of the day or with those of the evening previous. At least every one seemed agreed to keep his own counsel.

Before the gong had ceased to sound, Mr. Robert Warner was at his place at the table.

The light tap of Julie's French heels sounded on the stair, and a moment later she paused on the threshold of the breakfast-room:

"*Bon jour,* a kiss to each," she cried in a bird-like voice, and then skipped about the room; she seemed full of the ecstasy of reunion with old friends in old scenes.

"Oh, you dear old room! You sweet old pictures!"

She ran over to the Colonel, and kissed him on both cheeks. "Darling old lamb! To think I was so beside myself yesterday that I did not realize that I was again under the shelter of your strong arms."

But all the while the girl's keen intuition was cut-

ting to the heart of the situation. It did not escape her that the Warners were all in a dissenting mood, and she divined that she was in part the cause. In a moment her chameleon-like disposition changed color. The vivacity died out. She mutely took her seat opposite Araminta and to the right of Colonel Warner.

Her childlike depression touched the old gentleman's heart, and his resentment melted.

"Julie, it is good to have you with us again. No one is so welcome at the châlet as a de Layne."

"It's the happiest place on earth to me now that poor France is so torn."

She eagerly grasped the clew that would lead the conversation from the personal, and in a few moments held the interest of all with vivid narrations of what she had lately seen in France, and bits from letters that had followed since her arrival—of all save Araminta. The phantoms of the night before still drove her thoughts to torturing themes. She watched Julie without following her words and found confirmation of all the feminine witchery that she dreaded. She noted poignantly the dainty lace effects at her throat and wrists that only a French woman would know how to add to the otherwise simple morning gown, that clung so softly to her childish figure. She smiled ironically at her own tailored cuffs and severe collar. With amused disinterestedness she marked Julie's power over her father and grandfather. The same old Julie, the same world-old type; the same declared winner!

The little guest directed most of her conversation to

the Colonel. He was the ally she must win. Later in a private corner of the library she would tearfully cast her burdens upon him. There could be but one result from his chivalrous heart.

Araminta was grateful that Julie was the center of attention. Her desire was to mount her horse and escape even the company of her father down the mountain. A call to the telephone released her from the table.

"Continue your story, Julie, Araminta will not mind," urged the old gentleman.

Julie took up the thread of her thrilling narrative with but sickening enthusiasm. She was listening to Araminta's equivocal answers to Bob's evidently eager questions. "An affair!" flashed across her mind.

Immediately within her, conscience and necessity conflicted. It was frightful to smite the friend who had never failed her, to cast even a temporary shadow over her life. Yet Araminta was blessed above any that she knew. Home, parents, scores of admirers, and money! Bob could be very well spared from all this. While she—it was not of herself that she thought, but of kindred, and alas, Jean! Surely it were better for the one to suffer than the many to perish. Life was but a series of pains, it was only a choice of the least. Alas, alas, a complication, a detention. She must keep them separated. She must sound her own depths with Bob, and act accordingly.

Araminta rode slowly down the mountain. "Julie's head on his shoulder," ran her thoughts. Her grand-

father's account of the journey was acting like a poison in her mind.

The meaning of the telephone call was evidently that he wanted to explain, to do the honorable thing! Every nerve recoiled against such an act. How was she to live through it? He would not allow the scene between them to be tacitly dropped. Her throat contracted in a spasm of pain. She turned her horse from the road into the woods, and throwing her head forward on its arching neck, wept stormily the tears that had been welling up through the night. Suddenly she checked herself:

"I cannot appear at school with red eyes!"

She gripped her tortured feelings as she did the leather reins in her hands, waited until she thoroughly possessed herself, then proceeded into the open and on down toward the school.

"Hold on, Araminta," called her father, speeding his horse.

She halted to one side, was glad to have him join her now. She would practice the steadiness of her nerve.

"Going to have some lunch for Bob and me at twelve?"

"Yes, indeed, anything special?"

"Why didn't you bring Julie down and give her a lesson?"

"I do not think her taste is domestic, and anyway there is nothing for me to teach Julie." Her father glanced quickly, but she recovered herself. "You see, she is so French, American ways are not to her

liking, at least to the degree of desiring to cultivate them."

"What on earth?" He shaded his eyes with his hands and looked before him. "That can't be Bob riding like mad this time of day! Anything wrong?" he shouted.

"Nothing at all," young Mason shouted back, riding up and turning his horse on his haunches to come in beside Araminta.

"How's your head?" He leaned over and put his hand on the horn of her saddle.

Her face colorless, shaded paler:

"The ride down has already helped me. When I get another cup of coffee at the school I shall be cured, I am sure."

Bob drew back in surprise. Her words were kind but distant. "Her headache of course." Aloud he said:

"Delia Storel has already made the fire in the stove and made the coffee."

"Thank you." She colored a moment, but her restraint did not relax.

"Do you feel well enough to work?" he questioned gently. "Mr. Warner, if I had your authority with this young lady, I'd send her home to rest."

"I say send her! little you know the ways of that young woman. By the way, had any message from Hunter?"

"I don't know. Would you mind seeing? I'll come on directly."

Mr. Warner needed no second hint. Before Ara-

minta could interfere he good-naturedly galloped out of sight.

Bob saw an angry expression sweep over her face. He caught the bridle of her horse, and brought both animals to a stand.

"In heaven's name, what's the matter? Anything wrong about me? Speak it out."

"Rather an unnecessary question." She could have bitten her tongue for such an answer.

"You refuse to tell me?"

"I have nothing to tell."

"Then how on earth am I to right a wrong of which I am kept in ignorance?"

"I did not accuse you of wrong doing. My grandfather——"

Bob interrupted with a laugh that ran throughout the hills. At the mention of Colonel Warner, the whole of his ridiculous journey passed before him. It brought intense relief, and light, and satisfaction.

Araminta was jealous! Glorious tragedy!

The girl whipped up her horse. His levity stung her into fury. He galloped on beside her, but the sound of the horses' feet, and the distance she kept between them, made his explanation unintelligible.

"I beg your pardon for laughing."

But she did not heed.

They were going at full speed through the village. Arrived at the school, she sprang from her horse and threw her bridle to one of a group of children.

"All right, I'll tell you about it to-night."

She walked hastily into the house, calling back, "I

wish you would tell my father there will be no luncheon here to-day."

She was stunning in her anger. Yet he returned to the office light hearted, fully aware, however, of the price his levity would cost him. When she allowed him to describe yesterday's experience she would enjoy it equally with him. As it was, he did not regret the varying shades her jealousy had portrayed. Instead of the woe-begone face his partner expected him to bring back to the office, his expression plainly announced, "Give me anything to do; I can accomplish even the lifting of yon mountain into the sea."

And it seemed in the routine of ugly complications during the day, this wonderful working power was vouchsafed.

The day's fight had been as child's play compared to the task of atonement. He declined the invitation to supper. He must have time to think. Finally he decided to ignore her coldness, and boldly insist on knowing his offense. But what of the clinging Julie? His hope lay in the protection of Miss Polly.

He was nearing the fatal bend in the road, when a tiny figure bounded around the curve. It seemed as by the force of the wind to be blown down the road. Closer range revealed the little brunette Julie, gesticulating and talking most bewitchingly though unintelligibly. Her naïve gayety instantly beguiled his anxious mood; and he even forgot that he had wished to avoid her. He dismounted and walked beside her, chiming in with her spirit.

"Sit here beside me, Bob." She ran across to the

border of the woods, and seated herself under an old oak whose mammoth roots ruggedly spread themselves like a dragon.

Still holding the rein of his horse, he took the place beside her. But the charm was broken. His thoughts flew to Araminta, and his longing to be with her and to be reconciled, made him reluctant to linger even to talk with Julie.

Julie felt his reluctance; her heart sank.

"He loves Araminta," she thought. "Too late, Jean."

The faces of her loved ones in distress stood before her. She drew the forces of her small body in one determination: "It *shall* be—it is *not* too late."

Her heart quivered with the fear and excitement of battle, but she plunged in with the gayest of laughter.

"You should have been eavesdropping with me last night."

Bob wondered how the sorrowful Julie of yesterday could be the sprite of to-day.

"Have you ever heard that eavesdroppers hear no good of themselves?" he smiled.

"Too true, and this was no exception. I was excoriated by the Colonel."

Bob heartily joined in the laughter.

"Yes," she continued, "he thinks me the limit, but you a few degrees beyond me. But I have made my peace with him, and am once more in his good grace, with limitations."

Her laughter rippled and bubbled an accompaniment

to the words. Bob decided she was an enigma, but a most charming one.

"You must come and help me to get in right, too." He made the motion to rise.

"Mercy, no!" she detained him. "I would be entirely lost again if I were seen with you; you are regarded in the light of 'young Lochinvar.'"

"Well?"

"And you are not at all acceptable," she still rippled softly.

"Why?" He was very serious, though the least shadow of a smile lingered.

"Oh don't get so serious, it is not so bad as all that, that is, so long as you are not after the hand of his granddaughter. With me, now, certain concessions might be made."

Despite the frivolous tones, and honied glances, they emitted a sting so full of deadliness to his sensitive nature, that in a twinkling he was transformed.

"Oh, Bob," as she noted the change, "what have I done?" wringing her hands.

She had expected him to be violently angry, to resent the Warners' attitude. But this cold, proud hurt was beyond her.

"What can I do?" She started up, then threw herself against his arm, and bursting into frightened tears, babbled along in soothing extenuation.

"Araminta ran away, but Miss Polly stood by you; she said you were the grandest man on earth, and you are, Bob. Miss Polly told him you were worthy of Araminta or me either. Oh, I longed to be Araminta

to defy him—but he's got nothing to do with whom I marry, I——".

But she got no further. He gently lifted her from his arm:

"Good night, Julie."

A scathing disgust for her mingled with the light of the afterglow playing upon her face. It was bare now of the dross of fascination, and naked in its agony. She still clung, though he again attempted with firm gentleness to disengage himself. She held fast, sobbing and imploring—half French, half English. She was such a tiny creature to bear the weight of so much suffering. But the miniature hand that gripped his arm like a vice had snuffed the spark of happiness from his life.

She had warned him privately it was true. He should be grateful. He was—but he never wanted to see her again. Her size seemed to diminish as he continued to look down on her writhing and unintelligible agony.

"*Dit moi—dit moi*—— Ah, say that you forgive, or I will die here."

"I forgive you, Julie," he measured slowly, "and I thank you. Good-by."

"Not until you promise that you will see me sometime. Where shall it be? At your office, or at the mill dam, or where? I will not release you until you promise."

"I cannot think now, Julie, but I will write you."

She watched him mount and slowly walk his horse

down the road, then she fell on the oak roots again and sobbed out the despair of a breaking heart.

"Oh, Jean, Jean, I will never see you again."

The sound of Miss Polly's walking stick and Robert Warner's voice checked her tears.

"Julie de Layne! what on earth? You look as though you had broken your heart upon your face. Where is Bob? I thought you met him."

"He's gone long ago; I've been sitting here thinking over my troubles."

"Poor little child." And Miss Polly bent her stiff joints down to the oak roots, and comforted and loved the little granddaughter of Henri de Layne.

CHAPTER XXV

BOB rode along. His body seemed entirely separate from his mind. He was as though suspended in space. In fact, he was not conscious of physical feeling at all. It did not occur to him to check his horse when it turned into the path leading to Granny Tank's. He would have as readily allowed the animal to step with him off Witches Head precipice.

The humbleness of his birth was again emblazoned before him!

"Hold on thar! Whar be ye a'gwine?"

"Why, Granny, you shouldn't be out here in your night-gown."

He walked beside her, half lifting the hobbling form.

"Lord a'Mighty!" she halted with a cry. "Turn loose m'arm afore ye onhitch hit!"

He stopped and tenderly pressed the bent and skeleton shoulder.

"Forgive me; I did not realize. Let me lift you home."

"Cl'ar out thar; what's to hinder my legs from a'totin' of me?"

They walked on towards the cabin, she muttering maledictions on the girl for slipping away and leaving her alone.

"She thought I was 'sleep—and I fool'd her good—jist to make shore that she was a'gwine to run off. A good for nuthin' little heifer! I got a good mind to call up Raw Head's speerits 'ginst her. I'm jist a good mind to."

She squinted up into the face above her:

"What's a'ailin' of ye, boy?"

He did not reply, and she did not speak again until he lifted her in the door, carefully seated her in her easy chair, lighted her pipe, and threw himself in the doorway to await the return of her companion.

"I bet that 'ar Warner gal is at the bottom of all this. I told ye the wanin' of the moon allus brung trouble."

"Not at all, she is as helpless as I. It is the fault of nature, I was not born right, that's all."

"Not borned right? God a'Mighty! ye air borned jist as good as her; I'll be bound ye air. Jist as good as that old Polly, and that old mean Gran'pap, too."

He frowned impatiently:

"Hush, Granny, you don't know what you are talking about."

She hobbled over to him, spilling ashes from her pipe on the floor and also on his coat as she leaned down on a level with his face and hissed:

"I reckin' I knows what Hame was a'talkin' 'bout. And I reckin' she said you was that old Polly's nephy; I reckin' I knows 'bout that."

"Hush, hush, you are mad; my grandmother could not have said that?"

He dropped his head in his hands.

She laughed harshly. "I reckin ye air right, ye grandmammy couldn't a' said hit." She leaned over again. "Caze Hame wusn't no grandmammy of yourn. If she had a' bin, she would a' tole whar 'bouts ye come from, sez I." She resumed her seat, and fumbled about the skirt of her gown for her snuff box. "Lord, I forgit I never had no clothes on. Sez I, 'Hame,'" she continued, walking about the room until she located her skirt pocket, when, filling her lower jaw with the snuff, she seated herself and once more took up the thread of her story. "Sez I, 'Hame, why don't ye bust loose on them rich fokes and make 'em do ther part by him?'

"Sez she, 'I'm s'fraid that old Polly's a'gwine to git him away from me now that I mighty nigh die when she comes here. I done tole her ernuf lies to send me plum to the devil; I tell ye I have.'

"Sez I, 'What air ye a' lyin' s'much for?'

"Sez she, 'Caze she'll git him if I don't.'

"Sez I, 'Why don't ye let her have him?'

"Sez she, 'And me blind, and got narry child of m'own?'

Sez I, 'Hit's the young un's right to know whar'-bouts he come from, and if ye——'"

"Don't tell that to any one, please," came wearily. "I know you are trying to comfort me, and I appreciate it, but if anything of that sort would get out it would make me ridiculous."

"Ye air the bigges' fool I ever heerd tell on! Ye air, I tell ye, ye air, and what's more, I air a'gwine

to tell that old Polly soon's ever I git a chance to—take that and go."

He sat motionless in the doorway, listening and not hearing the continuous mutterings. The moon came up and illumined the room as it did the night old Tank died. Again the details were vivid. His feelings rose and fell through all the varying stages of his childhood heart aches, when hope quivered and despair sickened, on up to the present hour.

"In my Father's house are many mansions." He harked back to his first lesson from the Bible.

"Aye and on earth," he thought bitterly, "there are châlets and cabins; but, thank God, there can come from the cabin brave men, honest, and clean!"

His pride flashed defiantly as his thoughts gathered around the "Gray Eagle" and Ebenezer.

"And why should I not continue to mold my life according to their great and simple principles, instead of pinching my soul to crowd into the little pattern of bigotry? Bah!" He rose as he saw the attendant coming up the path. He squared himself as though shedding every narrow thought.

"I'll make my own tenets of social requirements, and those who cannot measure up to my standards, must remain without."

He laughed mirthlessly, though there was a touch of pity as for the first time he saw Colonel Warner man to man in the white light of truth. He saw him honest, though narrow and hide-bound to the accident of birth. To Joseph Warner the first requisite was

birth, whether the soul was great, small, honest, or scared. "Poor old man!"

He did not go to bed on reaching the hotel. He gave up his horse and walked, walked miles along the highway, until day began to break.

CHAPTER XXVI

BOB did not permit himself a moment to reflect. With an iron will he put Araminta from his thoughts, and fastened his mind keenly on the crowding complications of business.

He had no hope of effacing memory, and no wish to forget. But for the present he had no time for his feelings. His brain must go on with its tasks. He needed the force of every faculty to meet the culminating crisis.

The Electrical Company was at the end of its resources, and the Widow Filpot had taken a new lease on life. He could not blame the stockholders for demanding the appointment of a receiver. He shut his eyes against the visions of the wreck. His ambition was to save his partner; not only his wealth, but the great enterprise Mr. Warner had created. The confidence of most of his Western associates also urged him to hold on to the last gasp, hoping by some miraculous turn he might be able still to pull things through.

He was in his office early and late. Little notes from Julie punctuated the first few days. In desperation he took her on a business drive to the camp. After that in some way he found Julie the constant companion of his mountain trips. He wondered how he came across her in the most unexpected places. At

first the annoyance was keen, later he pitied her, finally grew accustomed to her presence and did not mind. She was unobtrusive, suiting herself to his mood and at times he found her entertaining.

He attended with punctiliousness the business meetings of "the school," which Miss Polly, unknown to Araminta and himself, was constantly bringing about.

These meetings, managed by Miss Polly, necessitated the intimate discussion of business and individuals. The elderly spinster frequently thought she divined a spark of reconciliation, but the moment business ended, a polite icyness marked their farewell.

Julie appeared daily at the school. Her vigilance in keeping Bob and Araminta apart was unceasing. She made herself conspicuous among the classes, particularly in cooking and needle work, insisting that things be done as "we do it in France." Between times she found her way into the village; to the hotel to pen a note; to the post office to post it; and sometimes boldly handing her message in at the office through Jim Willie.

"Only let me lay my hands on him once," she encouraged herself, "my weakness will appeal to him. After that I will interest him. The main thing is to keep the breach between him and Araminta."

She hated herself for the scheming. Her pride suffered for so conniving for a husband, but fate left her no alternative, not even the power to combat it. She was a victim of circumstance. Craigmore's half drunken epistles informed her that his liabilities were greatly in excess of the sale. He was unable even to

send her transportation as far as Athens. Each communication ended in, "Our only hope is your marriage with Mason."

Araminta did not in any way interfere with Julie's affairs. She, however, knew her to be responsible for Bob's sudden attitude. If he allowed Julie to sway him, well and good. Julie's intentions to marry him were plain, and she longed to assure her she would have no rival, and that her funny little circumlocuting ways were futile, save as amusement to the family.

To Araminta she was a nagging strain. The girl bravely battled against the soreness of her heart with hard work, but the pity and anger with which Julie kept her nerves tingling was telling on her. Dark lines came beneath her eyes and sunk deeper with increasing endurance. At times Bob's face haunted her; the touch of hauteur that at present marked his bearing, constantly reminded her of the loss of his friendship. Sometimes in the peace and darkness of her own room she felt that he, too, was living behind barriers and she trusted and forgave him. But the next day Julie with rare mastery would drive fresh pangs into her pride that, despite her suspicion of the girl, added height to the obstacles between herself and the man she loved.

Julie was late appearing at the school one morning; Araminta hoped she would escape her presence for the day. Scarce were her hopes raised when, fresh and jaunty, Julie tripped in, full of apologies.

She promised better hours in future:

"You see Bob detained me a moment, which grew

into an hour before I could possibly get away from him."

The elfish pout drove the color into Araminta's pallid cheeks.

"Look," Julie turned as though surprised, "what can your father's office boy want?"

It did not occur to Araminta, angry and weary, to question how she identified Jim Willie. She hurried to meet the boy, glad to get away from the inquisitive gaze.

"I'm so glad, Jim Willie, that you can get a lesson. How did you get off at this time?"

He held out an envelope:

"I never come to stay, I come to bring this."

It was from Bob addressed to Julie. Araminta handed it to her, and went into the garden.

Julie came running behind her:

"Oh, Araminta, I am in such a quandary!" She drew her apart from the pupils. "Dear, do you think the family would think it imprudent if I continued to drive about the country with Bob? You see it is impossible for him to call, and this is the only way we can be together."

"The family have taken no note of it, Julie, and anyway, whatever Bob asked you to do would meet with the family's approval."

"How about the Colonel?" Her eyes twisted in all sorts of insinuating expressions.

"I am sure you can make it all right with Grandpa, when you choose to explain."

She took the hoe from one of the little fellows, and

began digging about the roots of a sickly tomato plant. Humiliation throbbed painfully. It was impossible to hide it longer.

Julie looked into Araminta's face and saw that she was suffering. Remorse gave her heart a vicious stab. But the ruling ambition of her selfish, pleasure-loving nature held her to her purpose. So she skipped off with coquettish grace to answer the invitation to the drive.

Miss Polly had stood the estrangement between Bob and her niece as long as she could. Peace must come if she had to declare it openly. To be sure, it was a subject of "constant prayer" with her, and also a lot of diplomatic thought. She had maneuvered in ways that any but half-demented lovers would have long since divined.

Perhaps if she could bring them unexpectedly together somewhere and leave them—that was the old way and a good way. It must not be at school, it was too business like, and uncozy. The châlet was the place, if she could otherwise divert the ubiquitous Julie. The next difficulty would be to drag Bob up there. Also, she would have to resort to deception.

However, she would try one more "board meeting"; if that failed, then the châlet.

Bob came immediately in response and in ten minutes disposed of the subject of the call.

"Wait a minute, Araminta, do tell Bob about the Spacers."

She looked from one to the other. Surely Araminta

must feel his gentle consideration, and divine the personal interest that bound him to the school.

"Oh, yes," the girl wearily replied, "the woman literally cannot come to school, four little children under six." She waited for him to answer, but as he continued in thought she added, "I could take some one over and show her how to clean up, and——"

"You will clean up no one's house!" he flashed unguardedly, then hastened to retrieve. "Such work can be hired, Araminta; I will send a man from the mill to do it. After that if you and Miss Flemming would like to go over and give her other lessons, it is all right—at least," he finished politely, "that is my judgment."

Miss Polly was rejoicing over this exhibition; she would keep it up:

"Mine, too, Bob, but Araminta is very difficult to manage. I beg her not to go all over the mountains alone, that——"

"Alone! Impossible!" His brows contracted sharply in anxiety, and he turned suddenly to Araminta as if to plead with her, but her eyes were cold and vague.

"She does it," reiterated Miss Polly; "I have indeed regretted that your business kept you from taking—"

"My personal affairs are not under discussion in this meeting, Cousin Polly."

Miss Polly was indeed disappointed. The personal discussion she had so splendidly provoked was literally killed by Araminta. Though she continued to bravely "filibuster," it was no good. The meeting adjourned and no progress had been made.

What on earth is the matter with them? And what was the matter with *her* that she allowed them to keep her on the outside of it?

She followed Bob out, desperately determined to say or do something:

"Bob," she walked with him to the gate, "I wish you could come up to the châlet to-night or whenever you can, I have some important matters I want to go over with you."

"Can't you bring them to the hotel? We are still busy, you know."

"Of course you are, I hope you will always be." She looked offended. "But I had hoped that I could include myself among your minor affairs after office hours."

"Miss Polly!" The sadness of his face caused her to throw her arms on his shoulder and bury her face on his breast.

"My boy, forgive me, but you have neglected me of late."

He lifted her head, looked squarely in her eyes, and spoke with a melancholy hardly to be borne:

"Miss Polly, you are all I have in the world."

"My precious, precious Bob!" and the tears trickled down the wrinkles of her face.

"I will come to the châlet at five this afternoon."

He kissed her forehead and left.

Miss Polly would have released him from the pain she saw the visit caused, but her emotions held her until his rapid strides bore him beyond call.

CHAPTER XXVII

MISS POLLY walked back into the house for her bonnet. She must hasten home to be in readiness for Bob's visit, though what she meant by "readiness" was not clearly formulated.

"Haven't you been crying, Cousin Polly?" asked Araminta softly as she passed into the domestic science room.

"I'm just a little upset, that's all."

"Don't you need me? can't I help you?"

"I expect you can. Come to my room when you get home and I will tell you."

"All right, dear, don't you want me to go home with you now?"

"No, just so you are there by a quarter to five."

All the way up the mountain she clucked and jerked at the reins of the old horse, talking audibly to herself. She did not know the reason of Bob's and Araminta's differences, but she determined to advise them to overlook anything rather than suffer the hunger of a lonely life. The face of Henri de Layne rose in her memory, and with it the little jessamine covered summer house. "Henri, Henri!" she moaned audibly, "to think that fate stifled my voice in the hour of your need, and you never knew—never knew that I would have died for you." She touched the horse with the

whip. "Araminta and Bob shall be saved even though I have to bare my old broken heart to them." Another tap and the old cob sprang to the side of the road, almost striking the attendant of Granny Tank who stepped at that moment from the woods.

"What's the matter, Ellen? Granny Tank sick?"

"She hain't sick of nuthin', but jist meanness. She's a'sendin' me down thar after Mister Bob fer no reason on airth, but to keep me from a'sewin' on my new frock."

"You go tell her Mr. Bob cannot come this afternoon, he has another engagement."

"Lord! I wouldn't go nigh that house 'thout Mister Bob was with me for nuthin' on earth. She'd put conjur all over me."

"Pshaw!" Miss Polly turned the horse into the fringe of the wood. "Here, tie the horse, and follow me; I'll go and settle her. Bob is certainly not going there to-day."

When Bob returned to his office, he was on the eve of telephoning Miss Polly and asking to be released from his visit to the châlet. But he recalled her suggestion that he was ungrateful, and determined to keep his appointment. He saw Araminta drive past on her way home. She was alone. These solitary drives through the mountains now teeming with foreign labor were dangerous. Not long ago his judgment would have weighed with her. But her indifference and the sheer business status to which she held their intercourse plainly warned him that friendly offices from him were unwelcome. With a bitter smile he watched

her drive out of sight. Half an hour later he started on the fulfillment of his engagement with Miss Polly.

The sticky heat of the September day subsided as evening approached. Bob walked over to the stable for his horse, as though to prolong his departure. The trip was against the grain. The chance of meeting with Colonel Warner was not to his taste.

In spite of the disagreeable task the young man filled his lungs with the cool rising breeze, and his eye swept with pleasure over the mountain beauty. Some of the early trees rustled leaves of brown and red, but more of them were still somberly green. The touch of autumn in the air and on the forest played upon his senses, and finally stirred the buoyant, deeper forces of his nature. He looked the coming business crash in the face and even welcomed the changes in his life it would demand.

He would go West and make a place for himself in the industrial forces of a newer and more democratic society. He would put every power of his brain into the only world he was born to—the world of work.

He rode slowly, fearing a remote possibility of overtaking Araminta. He had no desire to thrust himself upon her. He had never been able to solve the question of her displeasure.

His knowledge of woman was so slight—in fact he was in total darkness of their ways.

To him, Araminta was "woman" in perfection, his ideal. He had faith in her to believe that her misconception of him was honest. He refused to allow him-

self to credit Julie's silly babblings regarding the effect of her grandfather's bigotry. The trouble had some other cause, but he was too ignorant to fathom it. His wisdom was with men, not with the gentler sex. Yet he could swear that she had responded to his love. But it was evident that she had ceased to care for him, and this was the fact that he must learn to accept.

He whipped up, became impatient with himself for permitting the revival of that maddening tumult to distress him again. It was weakness. She had refused to become a part of his life; every girl had a right to choose, and without explanation. He had no desire to snatch the last lingering look of a dying passion; rather would he leave it abruptly. His whole life had been a series of struggles. And yet he did not regret them; the fighting against odds had given him a courage that men traveling along smoother roads did not possess.

He would talk over his plans with Miss Polly this afternoon. To reconcile her to the turn his life must take was his only problem. He knew that she would fight against letting him go West, but he depended upon her good sense in the end to convince her of the wisdom of his course. When this was accomplished, he would have broken the last tie of the past. It would then be farewell to the old South, its traditions, its romance, its sunny skies and the rugged Hills of Habersham.

When he came to the trail that led off from the main road to Granny Tank's, from habit Bob looked toward Witches Head.

There just around the curve, he saw Miss Polly's phaëton tied to one side in the bushes. He brought his horse to a stand, as it flashed on him that Miss Polly must not be far off, and that it would save him from any embarrassment that might arise at the châlet. At the same time this would be a far more private place to unfold his new plans, and persuade her to his point of view. He had gone but half the distance to Granny's when he met Miss Polly making her way back.

"Oh, thank the Lord! Here you are, Bob."

"What's the matter, Miss Polly, why haven't you been resting?" Seeing her deep agitation he continued, "What's happened?"

"Stop, let's sit down on this log—yes, right here. I'm so happy, my legs have given out from nervousness."

The splotched face and trembling hands suggested terrible things to him.

"Here, look at this." She sat up, leaning against a tree and fumbling in a dirty snuffy tobacco bag which she finally handed to him. He took it to humor her, convinced something terrible was wrong. "Open it, open it quick. Empty it in my lap, quick, dear, before I lose my mind." In the deepest anxiety for her mental condition, the man hastily turned the bag upside down. A massive gold watch and chain fell jingling in a clump, together with smaller jewelry, cuff buttoms, studs, and a handsome seal ring.

"Yours, my Bob," increasing his uneasiness. "Your grandfather's, my brother's. Look at the inscription

in the back of the watch, look at the crest on the ring, look——"

"Of course, dear," he soothed, "of course, they are your brother's."

His mouth twitched nervously as she detailed the account of Robert Noy's marriage and murder, ending with, "and Granny remembers your father used to wear this watch."

"Dear, Granny Tank has told me all this, but, dear Miss Polly, my granny's name was not Minnie, it was Hame. Don't you remember you used to call her Aunt Hame?"

"Oh, Bob, Bob, can't you understand that Aunt Hame was never your grandmother? She was no kin to you except as the wife of your Uncle Ebenezer."

It was Bob's turn to tremble.

"Grandpappy, not mine?"

"He was your Uncle, I tell you, that's the reason they did not tell you. They were afraid of me. A shame to have kept you out of my lonely life! But the good Lord has brought you to me at last."

"But, dear, though I love you—the love of our hearts makes us kin—yet I cannot——"

"Yes, of course, like all men you are demanding proofs. Well, feel that wart behind your ear, feel on which side that cow-lick part is. Oh, my child, do not make me unhappy by doubting. Believe what I all along have known."

Dimly the recollection of the watch dawned on him. He remembered when they had taken it from the dead

body of his father, his granny had hung it around his neck. Faintly but surely he remembered falling down and breaking off the top. He looked to see if it was still stuck on. Sure enough the front lid had been mended in some makeshift way. He related the incident to Miss Polly.

Tears rained down her face. The nervous wrinkled hands clasped together:

"I knew it—I've said it all along."

He put his arm around her.

"And is that the reason you have always been so kind to me?"

"I don't know. I can't remember anything except that ever since you were a little boy I have loved you, and depended on you," she said brokenly.

Suddenly it came over him that he had meant to tell her of his intentions to leave the Hills of Habersham, but he could not do it now.

He gently lifted her from her low seat and led her down the rough trail, urging her the while to go home and rest.

"Let us keep it all to ourselves for a while." He handed back the little bag and insisted as she demurred, "Yes, I must grow accustomed to it first myself."

"I will not promise to keep it longer than to-morrow, unless you promise to come up in the afternoon."

"You know you are going to do just as I ask you to." He smiled tenderly.

"You spoiled boy! I'll fool you, too."

"Humor me for a little while."

"Yes, I expect I'll be doing exactly that for the rest of my life."

They had reached the phaëton and he lifted her in.

"Good night, Bob, my own at last," she laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked up into his face. "To think that you belong entirely to me! to me! I cannot realize it, that at last my old heart is content."

"Good night, Aunt Polly."

"Aunt Polly," he repeated to himself, as he turned his horse to the village. "Aunt Polly."

A bitter satisfaction swept over him that, according to the Colonel's standards, he was now eligible for the hand of Araminta, that under the aristocratic name of Robert Noy, the old Bob Mason would die. Not a bit of it. Miss Polly's character picture of her brother but inspired him to make the name of Bob Mason equal to that of Robert Noy of Halcome, and the Gray Eagle of Habersham.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ARAMINTA drove through the thick dust and glare of the village street. She was glad to be in the dust and glare, and to be alone. Exhausted with the conflict between herself and Julie she felt that the moment of decision was at hand. She must leave Haberwood, must get away from Julie and Bob. In New York she would get possession of herself. She longed for the bustle of the city, not the whirl and gayety of the metropolis she had always known, but the manifold activities of its wonderful charities.

She would go to one of the big settlement centers, and lose herself in study and work, after which she would return to the mountain school, the richer in experience and training.

The decision revived her.

The task, the big task of gaining the family consent to study in New York, was now before her. The sooner it was begun, the better, for on one point she was definitely determined, she would not witness the nuptials of Julie and Bob, which were evidently drawing near. Strong as she felt herself to be growing under the new force, she could not face Julie's triumph. She sighed deeply as the cruel truth forced itself through her tired lips, "Yes, I love him, but I will conquer it!"

She waited for the family gathering in the library after supper.

Julie began playing the most flippant dance music on the victrola. Araminta waited for it to cease. It continued until Miss Polly requested Julie to "leave off playing." Araminta seized upon the chance and addressed her grandfather. His spectacles fell to an angle which permitted him to peer clearly into her eyes.

"Grandpa, I want to tell you and the family that I am going to New York to study and work in a settlement."

"Study——" he could not complete the sentence.

"I want to do something, Grandpa," she spoke rapidly.

"I believe I have a talent with these mountain people, and I believe I could do much to help them if I had some training."

"Is this the fruit of modern education and travel?"

"It is the teaching of service, Grandpa."

"Tom foolishness!"

"Where will you live, Araminta?"

"I have not decided, Julie; that question is easily decided later."

"Well, I just thought I'd tell you about Mrs. Calin from Athens being at the new Suffragist Club."

"Never let me hear that unsexed word in this house!" the Colonel thundered, "particularly in connection with one of its women."

"Oh, forgive me," trembled Julie, "I thought——"

"Thought what?" The spectacles were pushed back

in place, and a lock of snowy hair brushed hastily from the broad forehead.

Araminta's face flushed with anger.

"She thought I was in sympathy with the movement, Grandpa." And though the voice was not raised, it was constrained by a note of unyielding strength.

"My granddaughter?"

She regretted to wound him:

"Do not think, dear, that I am clamoring for suffrage. Far from it—with me it is not necessary. I only extend a very small and weak hand to the women who, like oxen, are driven to the heavy yoke of man's work."

"God help me! That a gentlewoman of my blood should develop such mannishness. Shades of my fathers! She desires to go alone to a metropolis, live unchaperoned at a mannish woman's club who, on the slightest provocation, rush rabble-like into the streets parading like a——"

"Joseph," curls, chigon, and all lent themselves to Miss Polly's rebuttal, "you belong to two generations back. The girl has no idea of living in a suffrage club. She was simply truthfully explaining her sympathy, my sympathy, and the sympathy of every thinking woman. Try to shake the kinks of two hundred years from your brain, and——"

"Polly, your prejudices and partialities shut you out from this argument."

"The child shall go to New York, if I have to take

these gouty old joints there, and rent an apartment," she asserted.

"I do not fear your threat; it would cost a small fortune for you to have a comfortable spell of gout in New York."

"Make your plans to go, child." Visions of a spell of gout, of wiring for Bob, of Araminta's nursing her, and a grand finale to all their troubles, flitted through her brain. "We will start in October, and I'll bear all the expenses of the trip."

"Never! you are too broad minded and modern to chaperon a marriageable young lady. Only give you time, and we should be confronted with the entanglement of some impossible love affair."

As usual when he had finished, he rose to leave. The soft but indignant voice of Araminta stopped him:

"Grandpa, let me clear Cousin Polly from one thing. First, I never intend to marry at all, but if a man should cross my path who measured up to my ideals, I would marry him."

The old gentleman was stunned; he took a step closer to her and stammered:

"You mean that birth and breeding are no longer among your requirements?"

"I mean that I require a man rather than a name."

"I beseech you to desist, and from this time on, spare me from the painful discussion of modern ideals. They are too much for my years."

Araminta showed her distress. It was the first time

she had allowed herself to clash openly with her grandfather.

"Don't worry, I'll fix it all right," Miss Polly whispered as she followed the irate gentleman down the hall to his sitting-room.

"Joe, Joe, why will you not adapt yourself to the times?"

"Leave me, Polly. At least grant me the privilege of privacy."

"I have no idea of leaving you to brood in any such frame of——"

The door closed upon them.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE more Robert Mason thought of the strange discovery of his identity, the more he desired to prove it further. Evidently this was the wrong referred to in his grandfather's last letter. But the proofs! He must have positive confirmation before he allowed Miss Polly to claim descent for him from Robert Noy. Absorbed in such thoughts, he walked far beyond the straggling outskirts of the village, out into the lonely stretches of the country road.

He wondered what effect this new relationship would have on Araminta. He had tried to crush the thought before it clearly formed, but in spite of his discipline, hope spread her bright wings over him. He began to argue against this new optimism. Suppose the opportunity to plead his cause should come? He could now offer her neither the name of Bob Mason nor Robert Noy! He grated his teeth harshly, and doubled his strides, as with an oath he determined to win her with or without a name.

He regretted that he had not forced an understanding with Araminta before now. And yet, what had he left undone? His small experience with women did not help him to cope with the mysteries of the one woman. Childlike as he felt himself to be in the face

of this problem, a power stronger than reason urged his determination to make the fight.

First, the proofs. Where was he to turn for these cold bare facts? Facts that would enable him to fling back the name of Robert Noy into the moldy tenets of the Colonel's creed. He laughed derisively at the thought of bearing the name of Colonel Warner's kinsman, and desired the right to this name only to show his contempt for it.

Miss Polly must be prepared for his intended attitude. But could this be? The name that he abhorred as a symbol of bigotry was borne by her idolized brother, a man who paid the price of life in giving protection to a simple mountain maid.

The picture of Robert Noy as he held the Gray Eagle at bay, and the wildly generous act near the meeting house in the mountain glen, flashed before his inner eye. The blood rushed warmly through his veins. He felt a kinship with the brave and magnanimous spirit of his ancestor who surely bore no likeness to the crabbed autocrat of the châlet. He thrilled with the call of his blood to be worthy of its noble strain as he had been loyal to his mountain fathers. He was the offspring of Robert Noy as truly as of the Gray Eagle, and he would live with all his strength up to his double inheritance, awaiting only the fullness of proof to take the name that the accident of his strange childhood had kept from him. "And if the facts to prove my parentage exist, I will find them," he concluded.

This decision reached, he turned his face towards the village, towards work and action.

In the lobby he found Dodmore, the Electrical Company's counsel.

"When did you get back?" Mason greeted.

"About half an hour ago. Brought good news, too."

"Fine!"

"Yes, I've squeezed one more drop out of those Chicago turnips."

"You don't say!" And young Mason was back at once to business.

"Yes," continued the lawyer, as they started in the direction of Bob's room, "yes, they have given us until the first of January; old man Farrol was responsible for it. The old man's awfully soft on you. By the way, I've been thinking all the way back about the old Filpot woman over yonder, and don't you know, I believe Miss Araminta Warner could get that deed as easy as rolling off a log."

"Impossible!" Bob frowned with emphasis. Silence fell until the room was reached, their cigars lighted, and they were seated with their feet upon the table.

"It seems to me, Charlie," Bob reached over to flick the ashes from his cigar, "that there should be some way in which the widow Filpot's grandson could demand his share.

"I say demand his share! Did you ever read any of the wills made by those old-time settlers? Well you ought to. Go up here to the county seat, and look

at some of them, and then come back and talk about what the widow Filpot's grandson could demand."

"I didn't know the mountain people ever thought much about wills. They are usually so poor."

"Yes, but generations back, before they degenerated to the present poverty, they made the shrewdest kind of testaments. It would pay you some time when you are over at Rayton to go to the courthouse and read over some of those documents."

The thought sprang clear in his mind that the Gray Eagle's will might give the clew he needed.

"I'll do it to-morrow—maybe I can see deeper than you into the Filpot will."

The more he thought of the Gray Eagle's will as a source of the final evidence of his identity, the more determined he became to find that document. Certainly the story accepted by Miss Polly solved the puzzles of his unhappy childhood. His hunger for education and his granny's fear and dislike of Miss Polly, were all plain in the light of Granny Tank's revelation.

The morning found him an hour ahead of work, and ten o'clock saw him off to the county seat.

If he found "Minnie" left a child! Ye gods, and the child's name should be mentioned!

He sped through the village heedless of jolts, or of slow moving ox teams monopolizing the streets. In and among them he wound, escaping collisions by taking the chances of sloping, gully washed ditches. Once he was forced to slow down, to stop until the occupants of two hay wagons finished their exchange of news, and slowly unblocked the road.

The noise of his engine deadened the voice of Julie:

"Come up to the sidewalk, and let me get in, Bob! Bob!"

Not until her hand fingered with the door did he perceive her.

"Let me go with you."

"I don't think it wise, Julie. I am going to speed over to Rayton on important business, and I think the ride will be too rough for you."

She laughed and took her seat beside him. Araminta appeared on the porch of the school cabin. Julie waved to her.

"Tell the family I have gone over to Rayton with Bob."

The young man lifted his hat and the machine moved.

Julie laughed and babbled the whole way. Though her companion made no effort at conversation, yet his heart was light with hope, and he found himself laughing at her witty chatter. The road became rougher, almost impossible for a machine, along the line of the National Highway, where a new road bed was being blasted. On he pushed, making détours through the woods over temporary side cuts. Several workmen waved to him along the line, but neither Julie nor himself could gather what they shouted, until a guard halted him, and advised caution along the line of blasting.

"I told you not to come, Julie."

"Yes, but I told you I did not mind anything with you."

"Foolish child!" And he forgot all about her until they drew in front of the courthouse door.

"I hate to leave you out here. What on earth can you do with your time, for I may be in here ten minutes, or two hours."

"That's all right, I'll be in the dry goods store, or in the drug store."

The young man hurried into the old brick structure, and with some delay diverted the sleepy clerk from his humdrum duties.

"All right, sir, say you want one of the will books?" he asked with a yawn.

"Give me the records from 1860, and I'll look it up myself."

The scion of the Gray Eagle trembled as he turned the yellowed pages. Though the name of Filpot greeted him among the first wills inscribed, he scanned down the records until his eye fell on the name of John Mason. Without reading the words of the document, his eyes sped along the lines in search of the name "Minnie." For a second everything blurred and ran together as he read: "To my only daughter Minnie Noyer, I leave the cabin and bottom lands attached to it. In case of the death of any of my boys now in the war, their portion shall not be subject to subdivision among the remaining children, but shall go in full to Minnie's child Robert Noyer, etc., etc."

Mr. Mason dropped into the nearest chair, and dragged the heavy volume to him.

He read back over the fine faded lines twice, three times, as if the thing he had come to find were obscure

and incredible. Then keeping the place with his finger, he raised his head, and fixed his gaze on some distant object in the court yard. His face gave little sign of the complicated movement of thought and feeling that swayed him.

"What's the matter?" interrupted the clerk. "Maybe I can find what you are looking for."

"You can help me a great deal by expediting a certified copy of my great-grandfather's will." He placed the book on the table before the elderly clerk, who adjusted his spectacles, and remarked as he looked over it:

"The Gray Eagle's will. Lord, the stories I've heard about that man! Ever hear about that fight he had with the buck deer? They say he caught the deer by the horns and——"

"Yes, he was a marvelous man. Wish I had time to listen, but I am in the greatest haste now."

"Sometime you come up here and I'll take a day off and tell you about him. My father remembered when the Indians ran him to the edge of the precipice over Hurricane Falls. Yes, sir, they say he jumped a hundred and fifty feet into the pool below, and swam out alive. I believe it, too. And when the Revenue killed your ma and pa in the still, everybody said it was a good thing for the Government man that the Gray Eagle was dead."

"Did you ever know my father?" The young man's voice, though eager, was calm and steady.

"Didn't know him at all, he was so young when he was killed. But I've had considerable dealings with

your Uncle Eb. Good old man he was, too. Said he wanted me to write him a will once, but he never came back."

Bob made excuse to leave. He was bewildered. How had his true relationship to Ebenezer Mason been kept so closely secreted from him when it was so evidently known to the community? He started in search of Julie, but found her seated in the car apparently asleep.

"Sorry to wake you. Has it taken so long?"

"Not at all, I was enjoying sitting out here dreaming. Time never drags with castle builders. They have the kingdoms of the world in their grasp."

"What kingdoms were you grasping at then?"

"No kingdom at all, Bob, my thoughts were dwelling in a suffering Republic. Alas, my poor kinspeople! my poor friends! I would be willing to give my life if I could ever so slightly ease some of their burdens."

Her little face became so sweetly serious, and a womanliness never noted before caused him involuntarily to place his hand on hers resting on the side of the car.

"Julie, perhaps before very long I can help you to assuage some of the sorrows, at least of those nearest and dearest to you."

Fortunately the clerk called him to the door, or the town would have been treated to the spectacle of Julie's arms about his neck. As it was, she clapped her hands together, and sang snatches of little prayers to snatches of little tunes, until her escort appeared and turned the machine towards Haberwood.

"Oh, Bob, I am so happy!" She gave three rapid pats to his arm nearest her.

"I am, too, Julie, but don't let's talk. Sing if you want to, but don't say a word."

And sing she did. Airs from all the operas, love songs, everything with life and freedom. Her small voice gathered volume with the inspiration she gathered from her auditor, who unknown to her was deaf to his surroundings, and mechanically guided his machine over the dangerous mountain pass while his mind was filled with complications that opened with the proof of his parentage. The machine wheezed and jolted and chugged along the rocks and clods in the vicinity of the blasts until Julie reminded him:

"You'd better stop and signal one of the men."

"If we stopped on the incline in this upheaval of earth, the old engine would never start again."

The foreman sighted them.

"Come on," he waved, "but you'll have to go pretty close to the edge. Wait a minute, and I'll get the men to put some rocks——"

"Get out of the way—I'll take the chance," and he put on more power. As the machine lurched on the newly made ground it began to go on the downward slide.

"Jump, Julie."

The girl obeyed instantly. Bob was trying to extricate himself from the steering gear when the car suddenly turned over, quivering and snorting, and plunged down the embankment, plowing its way into the earth. It happened so quickly that the road build-

ers still stood with pick and shovel in hand. But Julie's swift command brought them to their senses. They rushed down the bank, expecting to find Mason mangled under the machine. After a short search they found him lying several yards from the wreck, face downward. Though he was unconscious, a deep gash in the head was the only wound they could discover.

Julie picked her way to Bob's side, she wiped the dust and blood from his face, skillfully bound up the wound, calmly directed the men to place him in the supervisor's car, and took his head and shoulders in her arms. In this fashion they drove into Haberwood.

Colonel Warner in his buggy was the first to see them. He turned and followed them in the choking dust of the machine. That Julie de Layne should be thus conspicuous engrossed his attention to the exclusion of the accident.

The inhabitants of the village swarmed after the procession. Exaggerated stories reached Miss Polly and Araminta, who, without hats, made their way through the crowd to the hotel where the injured man lay on a lounge in the parlor.

Colonel Warner entered as Julie, covered with blood, continued her ministrations kneeling beside the couch.

"This is no place for you, Julie. Come and get into my buggy at once."

The girl shook his hand from her shoulder, and would have refused, had not Miss Polly arrived and cleared the room.

Within the hour, Miss Polly had telephoned to Athens for her family physician to bring nurses, and to Atlanta and Baltimore for specialists. Nor did she permit the patient to be removed to his chamber until Dr. Gillum and the nurses arrived.

She could not witness the dressing of the wound, but retired with Araminta to a room she had taken across the hall from Bob's. Mr. Warner followed them. He constantly interrupted Miss Polly's emotional dissertations with questions that at another time would have been answered by his daughter, but to which she now gave no heed. She had not moved since Miss Polly had led her from the sick room. Her father became anxious.

"I think I had best take Araminta home, now that so much assistance has arrived. I'll hurry back, of course."

"You'll do no such a thing! I need her," and Miss Polly threw her arms around the girl and wept convulsively.

Later the doctors reported that the brain shock was not as serious as his condition at first had indicated. That it could only be decided by his mental attitude upon regaining consciousness.

"Lord have mercy! mental attitude? O my blessed Savior! You don't mean—unbalanced?" And the old woman looked crushed.

"Temporarily, perhaps," the elder physician admitted.

"How will we know?" Araminta's voice sounded far away.

"The recognition of either of you would be a good sign. But there is absolutely nothing more that we can do but wait."

The company's physician threw himself on the sofa in the sick chamber while the other two doctors rested in an adjoining room with the door ajar. Only the night nurse moved about; the two women beside the bed watched in silence. Occasionally Miss Polly, who was nearest the patient's head, would reach over and softly stroke the bandages. Araminta's eyes clung to the unconscious features that now from the white line of the dressing assumed a Roman beauty.

Miss Polly leaned over and whispered:

"Pray, child, pray for both of us—my thoughts have left me."

The girl's head bowed as though in obedience, but her brain, like Miss Polly's, was beyond the power of supplication. Soon the nurse drew a chair to the opposite side of the bed, and the silence of the watch was unbroken.

An hour passed—two of them—three, when the slightest quivering of his eyelids became perceptible. The two women scarcely breathed. Though the fluttering lids did not lift, signs of restlessness increased. The nurse leaned over to count his pulse; as her hand touched his arm the lids again quivered, and his eyes opened upon Araminta. The ghost of a smile quivered.

"Bob," his aunt spoke.

His eyes turned upward to the sound, and tenderness lighted the recognition.

The camp surgeon took her place, and Araminta found her way into her father's room. She did not wake him with the good tidings, but sat beside the window opening upon the east and watched the dawn dispell the shadows of the night.

CHAPTER XXX

MISS POLLY'S cup of happiness overflowed when the doctors announced Bob on "the high road to recovery," and the nurses were finally dismissed. At last she had her boy to herself. To pet, and coddle, and love to the content of her hungry old heart.

Over and over they discussed the Gray Eagle's will and the coincidence that the clerk of the court should have known so much about his family. But not a word of Araminta. She did not press his confidence, but determined before the delightful period of his convalescence was ended to speak plainly.

One morning he lay on the couch a long time with his eyes closed. Miss Polly watched him as she opened her Bible and pretended to read. She wondered if it was wise to tell him of the part Araminta played during his unconsciousness, and of how little she was affected by the confidence that he was of their own blood? No, she could not reveal the girl's love. Perhaps now was the time to tell him of her own tragic romance. It might urge him to a more aggressive courtship. She cleared her throat nervously. But, after all, was she equal to the sacrifice?"

Jim Willie entered with the office mail.

"Mr. Dillon says to telephone when ye're ready to dictate."

"What's the matter, Jim Willie? Are you having a chill?"

"I dunno, but I'm pow'ful cold."

Miss Polly gave him a dose of "pepper tonic" she brewed herself, and sent him home with the instructions to remain there until he was better; if her prescription did not work to send for the doctor, and she would "foot the bill."

"When must I tell Mr. Dillon to come over here?"

"You need not go back to the office, Jim Willie; I am going myself."

"Oh, my boy."

"You have coddled me long enough, Aunt Polly. I am well now, and must be at work."

"Don't overestimate your strength. Please, my son, wait just one more day."

But the winning of Araminta was pulsing through his brain. Though she had only written a formal note accompanying a basket of flowers "from the school," yet the flowers were from a bed they had planted together. Hope leaped with the message of the blossoms. The more he thought over it, the more convinced he became that it was a timid indication of peace. He strode across the room with the power of the Gray Eagle and the grace of Robert Noy.

"Calm your fears, dear; there is no danger. I know what I want, and I am going after it to-day—now."

He put his coat on, and Miss Polly handed him his hat.

"What is exciting you, son?"

"Aunt Polly"—he turned back to kiss her—"you and I are going to be the happiest people on earth some day."

At the entrance of Warner, Mason & Co., he met the Colonel coming out. They exchanged salutations, nothing more. The younger man did not note the frowning hesitancy of the older one, but hastened through the building to his private office. He closed the door, and called the number of the school over the telephone.

"Miss Araminta's gone home," was the answer.

The châlet wire was out of order, but he asked central to give the message.

"Ask Miss Warner if she can see Mr. Mason on a matter of importance, and when?"

Julie answered the telephone and cut off connection. Again the bell rang. She held the receiver to her ear, while "Central" persisted: "Mr. Mason wants to know at what time he can see Miss Warner."

The telephone buzzed and clicked with the added current. "What time? Mr. Mason wants to know what time?" Julie continued silent, and finally the operator gave up. Julie did not leave the seat at the telephone, fearing another call. A presentiment warned her. If she only had Craigmore to depend upon. He was past master at complicating situations when he was sober. "Would that he were sober and here!"

Colonel Warner entered the back hall from the side

veranda and testily questioned, "Have they fixed the telephone?"

"No, it's still all jumbled up and ringing."

"I intended to call at the office and ask them to prevent the ringing of our bell until the line was put in condition."

At that moment the bell sounded again. It rang full sixty seconds and then ceased only for a moment. Julie lifted the receiver, but it still continued to buzz. She hung it back—the ringing continued. The Colonel impatiently pushed the girl from the chair, and held the receiver in his hand until the sound stopped.

"Look here, Central," he stormed; "don't you dare ring my bell in——"

"Mr. Mason says, When can he see Miss Warner?" persisted the telephone girl.

"I don't wish to hear anything Mr. Mason has to say. I'll sue this company if you ring my bell again until the wire has been put in order."

He angrily replaced the instrument.

Julie followed him into his private sitting-room, took his hat, and as his head lay against the chair, she stroked it skillfully with her cold, tiny hands.

"Too bad, too bad, but it is all right now—don't fret over it."

"I am not fretting over the nuisance of the telephone; it's Mason. His impertinence in having my bell rung like that."

"Mustn't abuse, Bob," and she pulled a lock of silver hair in emphasis. "Remember, I've saved his life,

and one cannot help being very fond of a person whose life one has saved."

"I suppose you are leading up to some matrimonial impertinence from him."

"Oh, Colonel, if I dared confide the situation to you."

For once Julie did not know what she intended to confide. Her strategy reached a climax. If Bob gained Araminta's ear before he was committed to her, she was lost, lost!

"Situation?" He looked up, amazed. "What do you mean?"

Julie was desperate. She thought hard as she carefully closed both doors, then, as in childhood, took her seat on the old man's knee, hiding her face on his shoulder.

"I love him, Colonel. If you do not help me to win him I shall die."

"Help you to win a——"

She placed her fingers lightly over his lips to check the storm of expletive rumblings. "Please do not abuse him."

"Not abuse a rascal who has already compromised you publicly by lying in your arms in an open car? who, having won your heart, has not the good breeding to offer himself? The scoundrel!" He struck the table with his fist. "I will give him a lesson in deportment."

"Suppose he loves some one else?" She let the hand on his shoulder creep around his neck.

"He has no business to be in love with any one else,

when on every possible occasion he drags you into some scandalous exhibition. It has been my intention to remove you from his influence. I little thought Providence would humiliate me into demanding an alliance." He pushed the girl from his lap, and began pacing the floor. "God in Heaven! that I should countenance such a marriage, much less enforce it. But he shall learn what it is to trifle with a woman under my roof."

"Oh, Colonel, you could not do it so openly! It is too delicate a subject to be handled with clubs. Let it rest as it is for awhile. Maybe he may come of his own accord. I'd rather die than have him forced." Her face was white with fear. The avalanche of rage she had intended to fall on Araminta now recoiled upon herself. She was frightened. She threw herself into a chair and sobbed with mortification.

"Dear, dear Colonel, spare me such humiliation! Forget that I spoke—only make it possible for me to leave here, to leave America."

"My child, you are not capable of judging for yourself. No woman is against the rascal who ensnares her."

"But he has not ensnared me. I do not love him—I spoke falsely, I give you my word I did."

"Go to your room; I will handle the situation as becomes the dignity of your house."

"But that would not be to force him to marry me."

"Go, Julie!" he glowered with growing impatience, "and remember you are not to leave these premises unaccompanied by me. Neither are you in any way

to communicate with that man. You understand me, do you?"

A trembling nod answered him as she walked quakingly towards the door, where in a voice half lost in fear she begged:

"Don't let the family know!"

"I will respect your confidence, but go."

CHAPTER XXXI

BOB had just said "good night" to Miss Polly when a messenger from the châlet appeared at his door with a note.

"Wait below for the answer."

"Dey ain't no answer ter-night, he say."

"*He*—who is he?" thought Mr. Mason as the door closed and he tore open the envelope.

"To Robert Mason, Esq.,
Haberwood.

DEAR SIR:

With faith in your perspicuity, I am constrained to suggest the honorable reparation a gentleman makes to the woman, who through her affections, exposes her good name to the tongue of scandal.

JOSEPH WARNER."

"What on earth?" He held the letter in his hand, and read it again, and still again, without at all understanding it. He lighted a cigar in the effort to collect his thoughts, and, still holding the letter in front of him, concentrated his attention on the page without reading.

"Who on earth? Why, I've been with no one but Julie. Slander against Julie! Why, I'd shoot the man like a dog who dared even an insinuation against her.

He could hardly wait for an interview with his partner's father, and only the lateness of the hour prevented a visit to the châlet to demand the name of the old man's informant.

"Julie! Unprotected, homeless little child." He angrily chewed his cigar.

He reread the letter.

"To suggest the honorable reparation a gentleman makes to the woman who through her affections exposes her good name to the tongue of scandal."

"Marry Julie!" The thought sprang into his mind. "Impossible! She does not care for me in that way, and I could not offer myself when Araminta controls every thought."

He would ask for an interview and speak the truth to Colonel Warner. It was only justice to Julie.

Next morning on the stroke of ten his messenger handed him the reply from the châlet, which read: "The matter admits of no discussion."

"Then, by Heaven, we'll drop it!" he muttered angrily. "I'll not be forced by a narrow old bigot. The whole thing is likely a fabrication of his antediluvian quixotism. I'll drop it."

All through the busy morning the insolence of Colonel Warner grew upon him, infuriated him to the necessity of expression. Yet he dared not tell Miss Polly and provoke open hostilities. There was no outlet for him. Boil and seeth as he would, he had to contain himself.

Miss Polly noticed his absorption and, knowing that

her services as nurse were no longer needed, returned to the comforts of the châlet.

Bob pursued the angry tenor of his decision. He began to feel resentful towards Julie, who must have divined the purpose of her protector. Why had she not defended him? Perhaps she, too, was being coerced. Yet a voice far away from his anger told him that an alliance with him would not be unwelcome to her. But would not Julie refuse to marry him if she knew his affections were not at his disposal? That would end the situation. He would arrange through Miss Polly for her passage to France with abundant aid for those nearest her, and all would be smooth again.

He left the office in hopes of meeting her at the usual or unusual places; he went so far as to inquire at the school. Strangely, no one had noted her absence, or was interested in her intentions.

He started back to the business center, when in front of the express office his eye fell on Colonel Warner and Julie sitting in a machine in front of the door. There seemed to be no conversation between them; the Colonel was staring straight before him, while Julie was on the *qui vive*. Her tiny face had wasted perceptibly. The features were sharp and transparent, and nervously responded to her thoughts.

The change seemed unbelievable. Poor little fate-tossed waif! How she must have suffered! His conscience smote him, that in his anger against an old bigot, he, too, had added a buffet to her frail being; that ignorantly he had won Julie's affections. He

searched his brain to glean how this had been accomplished, but save for his passionate wooing in boyhood, he had in no way approached the sentimental.

At that moment Julie looked up. Already pale, her face looked ghostlike, then crimsoned, as she mirthlessly laughed and tossed a tiny flourish with her hand.

The chauffeur came out of the office and took his place at the wheel. The girl's hand fell to her lap, but her eyes raised bravely again in gay adieu, then filled with tears.

Bob Mason did not know whether he was mastered more by sympathy or admiration, but the farewell he waved in reply gave full assent to his intentions of acceding to the Colonel's demands.

It was all over. It was his duty to offer himself to Julie, and he would.

At least she might be happy relieved from the strain of poverty and dependence. He would keep this thought in his mind and forget her small faults. He would force himself into contentment. It was settled, and clearly so.

He returned to his office and went straight to his desk and drew paper before him. He pushed it away impatiently. In spite of his reasoning and the calmness with which he accepted its logical results, a depression possessed him. He would attend to business first. He felt for the button to call his stenographer. Julie's face rose before him, with all gayety gone. He saw it lined with tragedy as he had looked down upon it that afternoon at the bend of the road when the light of the evening afterglow revealed it mockingly.

He felt the pressure of her frail hands as she clung pleading with him. No, it was beyond him. He would not desert Julie.

Old man Kite accompanied his stenographer.

"Jim Willie's pow'ful bad off," he said, filling the room with the fumes of liquor, "and the old 'ooman's nigh 'bout broke down. She axed me to ax you to fetch the Doctor down thar."

CHAPTER XXXII

JULIE was in a quandary at the meaning of Bob's reassuring gesture. Was it pity for her that had brought him to surrender? She sickened with shame. On reaching home, she threw herself upon the bed and wept stormily. She tore her handkerchief with her teeth. Later exhausted, she lay sniffling and pouting like a child. But her brain was in no way childlike. The fury of a woman at bay worked within her soul. After soothing her feelings for an hour, with varied scenes of spurning his offer with all the power of her resentment, she changed her mind. She determined to accept him. To use him for France and Jean. He should pay the debt of her humiliation to them. At one time she would have given him the best that was in her; now he should give his best and more. With his means at her command she would start for the scenes of war and for service. At least it would bring peace. How she longed for peace!

She was late coming down to supper; in fact, she had forgotten about it until the gong sounded for a second time. But she ran in gayly with excuses, and her jocular chat with Miss Polly formed the conversation of the meal. Araminta listened and watched. The conduct of their guest for the past week had be-

gun to throw a dim light on certain vague suspicions that clung unfostered in her mind.

Julie felt the silent gaze. She sneered at the price of Araminta's loftiness. She wished Miss Polly and Araminta would hasten their visit to New York. It would be easier to carry out her plans without them.

"I see the papers are calling for more Red Cross nurses. Araminta, why don't you hurry on and take a course? I would if I had the opportunity."

"And who would fill her place here, if she left for good?" Miss Polly kept an eye on Araminta.

"Make Billy marry a lady of altruistic tendencies who could be domesticated to the mountains. Such splendid heroism as Araminta's should not be hidden away under the violets and rhododendron. She should be in the wake of battle."

"Julie, stop, or I shall leave the table," commanded the old autocrat.

"I just thought——"

"Never mind what you thought. The topic of ladies nursing strange gentlemen is not applicable to my granddaughter."

"Don't be so drastic, Joseph. The nicest girls all over the land are nursing. If you really would like to take a course, Julie, I'll see that you have the opportunity. It would be the very thing for you."

"Polly Noy!"

But he got no farther, for at this moment the figure of old Zeek appeared in the doorway. Before his elaborate genuflections were half over, Ginny the married daughter of Belinda Kite, pushed in before him.

"Oh, Miss Araminty, Jim Willie's plumb gone out of his head. He's jist a'yellin' for ye ever' minute, and me and Maw kan't do nuthin' with him."

Mr. Warner started to the telephone.

"Have you sent for the doctor?"

"We done sont for him, but nobody kan't tell wharbouts he's gone. Mister Bob went after him hisself. Mister Bob's down thar now, tryin' to help Maw hold him."

"Why on earth didn't you come earlier, woman?" demanded the Colonel. "Why do you people always wait for night?"

"'Caze Mister Bob said as how Jim Willie was so bad off, he was feerd for Miss Araminty to come thar."

"It is certainly impossible for her to go now. Impossible!"

"Oh, Grandpa, I must go. You will drive me over, Papa, won't you?"

"He won't be here ter-morrer for nobody to go to——" meekly and huskily answered the woman, "and him all the one Maw's got to depind on, too."

The runabout had been ordered, and Araminta was refilling some of the bottles in the medicine chest, and gathering up a few possible necessities, when an automobile noisily chugging stopped at the gate.

Bob came in hurriedly. Seeing Ginny, he knew that his errand had been forestalled. He glanced hesitatingly around the family group, and stepped near Araminta, who appeared with her bundle.

"I've tried to put off coming, but we cannot locate

the doctor, and I am at my wits' end. I thought," he explained, "if you could stay long enough to quiet him, I'd bring you back as quickly as possible."

"Certainly; I was going anyway with Papa, but now that you are here, he need not go, and you can take both Ginny and me."

The Colonel and Mrs. Warner would have protested, but they knew the iron in the girl's blood.

She had already taken her hat from the rack and pinned it on.

"Stop, Bob; Araminta! Wait, I am going with you."

And Julie started to run up the steps to change her dress.

"I don't think you could do anything, Julie," Bob answered firmly.

"Yes, I can"—she hastened on to her room, unfastening the lace blouse as she went—"it will not take a minute."

But before the change was half completed the engine started. She called through the window again, but the machine was moving. Nervously she clutched the parted curtains a moment, then threw herself across the bed in tears of rage.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BOB guided the machine slowly down the mountain. The necessity of carefully picking his way made excuse for silence. The thoughts that were uppermost in the man and the girl brought them close together. They were at work once more with all the conventionalities pushed aside. Never had they been so aware of the strength of the bond that had grown up between them. Each was conscious of the other and embarrassed by the consciousness. But both were happy.

Visions of Julie's piquant flower face as she had watched it lately upturned to Bob's swam before Araminta, but faded away as she glanced at the face of the man beside her, that was full of pent-up tenderness for her, or intuition was deceiving her.

At a jolt in the road Bob turned and caught her eyes studying him. He was about to speak. But Julie's figure rose before Araminta. She cut short his words with a little laugh and remarked about the mountain speedway.

They left the machine on the roadside, near the Kites', and walked through the woods to the cabin.

"Have you any idea of the cause of his delirium?"

"Not in the least," answered the deep voice that sent her blood pulsing again; "I know nothing about

sickness, though I saw the boy was ill and sent him home several days ago."

"Yes, I've been sending him things from the school, but his mother said he was not very sick"

It was only a little after nine o'clock when they reached the cabin, an hour which usually finds the mountain people wrapped in slumber, but to-night Belinda Kite's one room was packed with comforters and "helpers."

A rumor of the delirium of Jim Willie had passed around all day, and by nightfall it had drawn the neighbors from miles. The room was suffocating with the fumes of stale tobacco and onions. Some of the experienced men and women were taking turns at holding the patient. Others clustered about the bed, peering over each other's shoulders as far back as the doorway. Many whispered their opinions in loud undertones, which, when they conflicted, rose in a hum above the delirium of the patient.

The way was made for Araminta. Bob shuddered for her as she entered the fetid atmosphere. She turned once with a distracted expression, but at sight of the lad wildly calling her name, heat, evil odors and irritating voices were forgotten.

Jim Willie at once slightly responded to her touch and the soft tones of her voice, but only for a moment.

The buzz, which had paused through curiosity, began. The delirium burst out afresh, and with greater violence.

Bob cleared the room, leaving only such neighbors as Araminta thought competent to assist. He held

the candle for her to consult the medicine case. She would have discussed with him the advisability of giving the boy a small portion of morphia, but the many eyes fixed on her, and the ears alert to catch every word, made consultation difficult. She remembered a trained nurse had once told her of an experience when she had administered morphine without the sanction of a physician, and had saved a life.

Clearly it was the only thing to do. A small dose could not possibly harm. She daringly administered it.

Later when Bob returned with ice, ice bags and other commissions, she wanted to confide in him the risk she had taken, but the cabin was still too full of curious spectators.

"Have you got in touch with the doctor?" she contented herself with asking.

"No, we simply have to wait. He's been called somewhere in the mountains. But I have wired for a nurse from Atlanta."

The effect of the morphia soon began to show upon the patient. He sank into a sort of restless prostration. Bob released his hold on him, but Araminta continued to stroke his forehead with soothing touch.

Bob could not remove his eyes from Araminta's profile as she watched the boy. Though her face was strained from anxiety, she seemed to him never so glorious as in the dingy dimness of this vigil. He blessed the necessity that had given him even this forced companionship.

As the patient's muscles more and more relaxed

Araminta's misgivings about the narcotic began to grow.

"What if she had given him too much? What if it was the wrong thing entirely? What if she had taken the pellet out of the wrong bottle? The candle light was very dim, and in her first excitement it was possible to have misread the labels. Suppose she had given him strychnine? Why doesn't the doctor come? I wonder if Jim Willie ought to look as he does? O Lord, if I have poisoned him or maybe killed him!"

In terror she bent closer, regarded him more narrowly, began to conjure up conditions that did not exist.

Bob watched the varying changes of expression, and wondered at her increasing anxiety. To him the boy was sleeping heavily. But to her he was drifting into coma.

She put Belinda in her place beside the bed, and stepped out into the cool September night. Bob followed at a distance. She walked aimlessly away from the few people who still remained on the outside, down to a little stream which ran from a spring above. Throwing her hands above her head, she wrung them in agony.

Bob hastened to her.

"What is it, Araminta?" he entreated.

"Oh, suppose I have given him strychnine by mistake! What are the symptoms of strychnine poisoning?"

"No, you haven't," he comforted, "because I was

on the jury once, and know all about it. He would be in spasms by now."

"Are you sure?" She fell against a tree, quivering in every nerve. "O God! forgive my reckless efforts! Spare him! spare him! Oh, when will the doctor come?" Her head was thrown back, and her eyes lifted, staring through space. "Oh, spare him! When, oh, when will the doctor come?"

"Araminta"—Bob was unconscious that he held her in his arms—"you have done no wrong, the boy sleeps."

"It may be the sleep of death; I may have killed him!" She dropped her head against his breast. He furtively and tremblingly kissed her hair, when he would have given his soul to feel the pressure of her lips.

"Araminta, you are overwrought. I read the label, which said 'morphine.' I handed it to you; if there is harm done I am to blame."

For a second her eyes burned a look into his, then it faded.

"No, no, you did not. You cannot suffer for my sin. I alone——"

"Araminta, I will suffer for you, or with you, or die for you."

She nestled closer.

"Anything that you do is right." His voice was low with feeling.

"Oh, if I dared go back and look at him."

"I will go, except I am afraid I'll wake and find

you gone. Even in a dream I am not willing to lose you again."

"But Julie—what of Julie?"

"Well, what of Julie?"

"But you—love her—you have always loved her."

"Good God at last! Julie! Julie! There is no Julie; there is just you, only you. I'll go and look at the boy; don't move."

"I will not."

Jim Willie was raving again. Bob hastily called her from the door, and through the rest of the night they held and soothed him as best they could.

"Can't ye give him a leetle more of that 'ar truck that done him s'much good when ye first come?" asked the father.

"No, I'd rather wait until the doctor comes."

"I wush ye would," pleaded Belinda. "Hit's the pow'fullest conjure I ever seed."

It seemed inhuman to withhold the remedy.

"I will take the responsibility, Araminta," Bob insisted; "get the morphine."

"Never," she replied, replacing the ice bag the boy had shaken from his head.

"I jist b'lieve he'll die afore the doctor man gits here, Miss Araminty."

But Araminta would not risk a repetition of the dose. The scene was pathetic, and the nursing exhausting, yet she struggled on until the dawn, when the doctor arrived. A sigh of relief went up from all about the bed.

"Heavens, man," exclaimed Bob, "where on earth have you been?"

"To the widow Filpot's" he answered quietly.

"Is she——"

"An angel," he answered, examining the patient.

The sun was just above the horizon when Araminta and Bob walked up the mountain to the châlet. Every tree and twig seemed to shimmer with life. The birds carolled a welcome to the crimson light in the east, to the sweet, fresh odors of flowers and herbs, and to the lovers who came with happiness sparkling on their faces even as the dew upon the woodland growth through which they picked their way.

In the meantime life had passed far from calmly at the châlet. Colonel Warner watched Bob and Araminta speed away through the mountains in the darkness, and then the thunder of his wrath broke. His anger waxed so apoplectic that Miss Polly decided to reveal Bob's identity in the hope of changing his mood. This proved a master stroke.

At sight of Robert Noy's watch, the crested ring of his great-grandfather's and the smaller jewels he himself had purchased, the old man's fury melted and his mind fastened half credulously on the chain of convincing evidence that Miss Polly produced.

Reverently he gathered the sacred relics back into the snuffy tobacco bag, and defiantly picked up the will of the Gray Eagle. He bowed silently to the family, and in lonely dignity that none dared to disturb tottered to his own chamber.

Later in the still of the night he made his way back

again to the library, where in his youth, with Minnie, he had kept vigil over the departing spirit of Robert Noy. Now the gray-haired Zeek with humble sympathy shared the second watch, in which his master struggled to reconcile Bob Mason, the self-made man of the hills, with the descendant of his knightly cousin. The face of the young man reflected only the features of the fearless mountain grandfather. He saw again the rugged strength of the Gray Eagle's face lighted by the flames of the hunter's fire, his piercing eyes lifted a moment from the dripping bloody knife to greet the strangers.

"Impossible, impossible," he muttered; "something is out of joint. This man is all Gray Eagle."

"But his hyah parts cu'r'ous like Mars Robert's done," ventured Zeek under his breath.

Joseph Warner paced the long room up and down, framing an argument against Miss Polly's assertions, stopping only to handle with affection the watch and ring. He scrutinized closely the will, and quoted from it again and again: "But shall go in full to Minnie's child, Robert Noyer."

Slowly his stubborn will began to yield. This detail of evidence pinned the facts together unanswerably.

"All true, all true," he muttered, and resumed the endless pacing. The early sun glittered upon the inscription of the watch, which he held in the strong light of the window.

The sound of Miss Polly stirring in the room above interrupted him. He looked around for a means of escape. Zeek interpreted the glance.

"Less us go out in de woods, Marst'r, tell you gits ready ter talk."

The two old men wandered out into the solitude of the forest in travail of spirit to readjust their lives to the new Master of the Hills.

"I feel very tired, Zeek; let us rest on this log."

"Dat's right, suh; you set still. I'm gwine run back ter de house, an' bring yer er pot er coffee, an' er mint julip."

The Colonel made no protest. He was fagged in body and spirit, and with elbows on his knees he rested his face in his hands, while his thoughts traveled over his fruitless search for Minnie. "For Minnie, yes, but not for Minnie's offspring. Unbelievable! Who could have been expected to put faith in Polly's fiction!"

He did not hear that lady puffing and scuffling among the briars and undergrowth. Not until she began to call vociferously did he raise his head.

"You, Joe, you may as well answer."

"Ah, well it has to be faced," he muttered and rose to meet her, when a second voice from out of the wilderness called:

"Grandpa, what are you doing out here before breakfast?"

"I came to——" he began in confusion.

"Welcome, Robert Noy," breathlessly interposed Miss Polly, with her hooped skirts balancing about her knees to facilitate progress.

Joseph Warner braced himself, and extended his hands to Araminta's companion.

"Robert Noy, I have——"

Bob grasped his hand.

"Don't, Colonel. It's all right. All's well that ends well."

"My God, that I never saw the likeness before." His lips quivered as he sank upon the log. "Blind, blind, I can never repair the wrong."

"I'll do it, Grandpa," said Araminta, taking Bob's hand. "I'll make full reparation, if you'll bless us with all your heart."

"Hurry up, Joe, for heaven's sake." Miss Polly nudged him.

"But Julie," he murmured.

"Julie! Don't spoil everything with Julie."

"But," he protested.

"Oh, she made a clean breast of it to me last night. All she wants is money, and I'll see that she gets it. Hurry, Joe; no, wait," as she saw Zeek appear with a mint julip frosting down the sides of a tall silver goblet. "We'll drink a loving cup with *my* children, an *old maid's* children." She laughed joyously as she handed the cup to Araminta. "Let the bride kiss the cup."

Araminta touched her lips to the goblet, and exclaimed as she handed it to Bob:

"The Gray Eagle of Habersham, the Master of the Hills."

THE END

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